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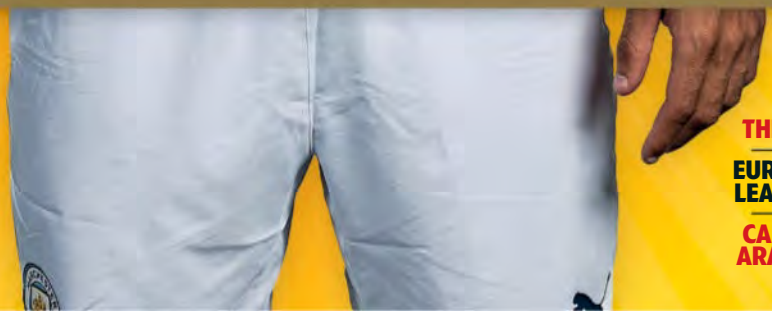

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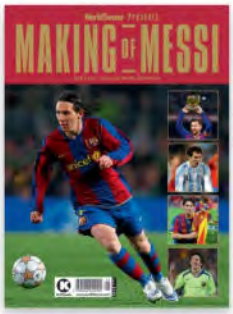

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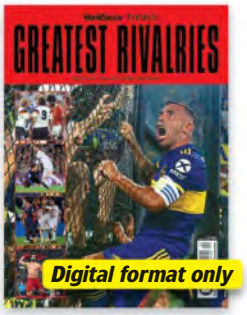

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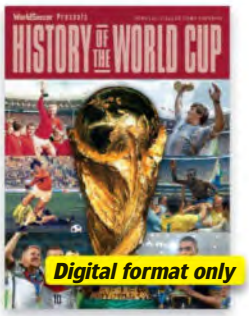

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It's that time of year again: *World Soccer* awards season, when we recognise the players, teams and coaches that defined 2024. A big thank you to our panel of experts who voted in this year's awards.

This year, there was an undeniable theme to the award winners and the contenders – although we'll let you discover what that is for yourself on page 28.

It's also the time of year when many competitions come to a close. Congratulations to the new champions of South American football, Botafogo, and to all the teams that came out on top in Europe's various summer leagues.

Jamie Evans, Managing Editor

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Paraguay... players of Argentina's Racing Club cut pieces of the goal net as a souvenir after winning the Copa Sudamericana final

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Henry WINTER
THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Rodri: a worthy World Player of the Year

Player of the Year...Rodri won the Ballon d'Or award in October

Rodri. It had to be Rodri. Just look at Manchester City's prowess with him and their problems without him. They're a constellation of stars and Rodri is the one who makes them shine brightest. No wonder they miss him. Look at how important he was for Spain in becoming European champions. It's why I voted for Rodri ahead of Vinicius Junior in the Ballon d'Or and *World Soccer* awards.

A very simple message was contained in the angry reaction of Vinicius Junior and Real Madrid to the Brazilian not winning the Ballon d'Or. The message was how much the award for best men's player in the world mattered to them, not how little. If Vinicius and Real had just shrugged, and posted congratulations to Rodri, it would have suggested eyes on other prizes, more collective ones. But the rebukes and boycotts signalled how much they cared about the Ballon d'Or.

Such has been the splenetic reaction on social media that the organisers, *France Football*, contacted some of the 99 jurors (journalists representing the top 100 FIFA-ranked nations, minus Syria) to check they were okay. The editor-in-chief Vincent Garcia wrote that some jurors were afraid to see their votes published "for fear of harassment against them or their family". That's sad. Football should be a celebration. I was more than happy to see my vote for Rodri published. If you believe it, stand by it.

I've had the honour of being the English representative on the Ballon d'Or jury for 20 years, been active on Twitter/X for 15 years and tend to ignore the abuse (while also being very conscious that I don't get the racist and sexist hounding that others endure). I've never blocked anyone, even the follower who tweeted me the same four-letter C word at the same time every day for almost a year. Regular as clockwork, rude as hell. I actually worried about the poster with the filthy lexicon when the daily digs suddenly stopped.

The Ballon d'Or whips social media into an annual frenzy. The respective fanbases of Messi and Ronaldo were

incredibly forceful in backing their man over the past two decades, although almost uniting in outrage when we voted for Luka Modric in 2018 and Karim Benzema in 2022.

Members of Vinicius' extensive fan club did make their displeasure known to me – and fair play to them for sticking up for their man. I appreciate the regular reminder of people's passion for football. Apathy is more worrying. Anyway, I've received far more abuse when arguing repeatedly that Arsene Wenger was staying too long at Arsenal, mentioning Liverpool fans jeering the National Anthem at Wembley, and sticking up for Marcus Rashford, Manchester United's underperforming attacker.

Individual awards in a team sport are inevitably subjective, and the debate simply highlights the interest in the Ballon d'Or in its 68th edition. When the 30-strong long-list is emailed through in late September, secrecy is demanded with shades of *Mission: Impossible*. We get sent a personal code valid for 15 minutes after activating to access a secured electronic voting platform. This year, organisers introduced a code of conduct, putting into print what was accepted practice that jurors "have to agree to avoid personal biases, affiliations, or sentiments towards clubs, countries, national federations, confederations or individual players that may compromise the objectivity of their judgment". Quite right.

Silence is also golden. Don't give away any clue as to your voting intentions. I get calls from TV, radio and newspapers asking who I'm voting for or, more subtly, who I think is playing well at the moment. I'm sure all the other jurors get the same. I don't know. We don't talk. It's vital to respect the confidentiality and integrity of the Ballon d'Or. It's also democracy in motion, a point that Real appeared to miss. Rodri received 49 first-place votes to 35 for Vinicius. There was no conspiracy against Madrid whose players were well-represented: I voted Rodri first, giving him 15 points, then Vinicius Junior (12 points), Jude Bellingham (ten) and Dani Carvajal (eight). That's how it finished overall: a celebration of a Real Madrid trio but also a fair reflection of Rodri's phenomenal year.

A joy to watch... Vinicius Junior

Rodri won more, contributed more, was acclaimed more and met the criteria more. We "must consider individual players' performances during the designated football season before evaluating club and national team achievements, as well as the players' football skills and ability and their sense of fair play during the season".

On all counts, Rodri scored highly, starting with performance. He's two players in one: ball-winner and ball-user. Others have done this before – Frank Rijkaard has been mentioned – and Rodri simply continues to evolve the role. He makes it look effortless, too, the sign of a great. It's even occasionally called "the Rodri role". He takes responsibility, dropping back, splitting the City centre-backs, taking the ball and taking the initiative. He brought authority and control to Spain's midfield, guiding them to the final of Euro 2024 and being named Player of the Tournament. He scored 12 times in 63 appearances for City and Spain last season – from deep midfield.

Do people go to football to watch Rodri rather than Vinicius Junior? Unlikely. Vinicius is a joy to watch. But football is not simply about the entertainers. It's about those who work in the shadows, winning the ball, repelling the enemy, building platforms for others. The Ballon d'Or is about the most influential player in the world in a given period, regardless of position. Fabio Cannavaro and Luka Modric have been worthy past winners of the Ballon d'Or because they raised their game to incredible heights, inspired team-mates and delivered trophies.

Rodri is widely respected amongst his peers. They respect his journey as well as his current prowess. They know he took time to make his way at Villarreal and then to settle at City but how hard he worked. They admire Rodri as a man, too, with the way he finished his business studies while also giving everything to make it in such a demanding profession. Rodri represents City and Spain well. He represents his profession well. He's a good spokesman for his sport, arguing cogently about the need for FIFA and UEFA to think more about player workload. Many players believe this privately. Rodri articulates it publicly. Leader and midfielder, ball-winner and winner, Rodri deserves his awards.

> Members of Vinicius' extensive fan club did make their displeasure known to me – and fair play to them for sticking up for their man

• ASK HENRY
Submit your questions to Henry Winter by subscribing to our weekly newsletter at *worldsoccer.com*

Henry's Picks

How Henry Winter voted in the 2024 Ballon d'Or vote:

1. **Rodri** *(Manchester City & Spain)*
2. **Vinicius Junior** *(Real Madrid & Brazil)*
3. **Jude Bellingham** *(Real Madrid & England)*
4. **Dani Carvajal** *(Real Madrid & Spain)*
5. **Lamine Yamal** *(Barcelona & Spain)*
6. **Lautaro Martinez** *(Internazionale & Argentina)*
7. **Phil Foden** *(Manchester City & England)*
8. **Emiliano Martinez** *(Aston Villa & Argentina)*
9. **Erling Haaland** *(Manchester City & Norway)*
10. **Florian Wirtz** *(Bayer Leverkusen & Germany)*

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Chasing ratings

Football's relationship with television has changed immeasurably over the years

Departing Match of the Day... Gary Lineker

Kenneth Wolstenholme was much more than the man whose commentary spontaneity delivered one of the most enduring clichés in modern English language in the closing seconds of the 1966 World Cup final.

Wolstenholme, who died in 2002, had been the voice of what little TV football coverage there was in the 1950s and in launching *Match of the Day* on August 22, 1964.

He achieved much more in his life than a footnote to broadcasting trivia. Wolstenholme was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) after flying more than 100 missions as a bomber pilot in the Second World War; later he led an RAF pilot instruction team when his No.2 was Nicholas Winton, renowned now for his work on the *Kindertransport* out of Czechoslovakia.

Television was then in its infancy and the BBC was a very different animal with its haughty Reithian motto that "Nation Shall Speak Peace Unto Nation." TV football has traversed a long journey from black-and-white single-camera imagery to colour to video replays to technological wonders tracking every single kick and grimace.

> What does football expect of TV? What do fans expect of football on TV? What does TV demand of football and what are the consequences, domestically and globally?

Wolstenholme and his like could not have dreamed of what the industry would become: one where a former England footballer leaving the BBC could make front-page news, a pop star would turn up as Champions League co-commentator (Noel Gallagher on TNT Sports), a social media influencer would turn out in an Argentinian league match ("Spreen" Ivan Buhajeruk briefly for Deportivo Riestra), heads being turned at home and abroad by Hollywood actors buying a Welsh football club (Ryan Reynolds, Rob McElhenney and Wrexham) and a celebrity chef (Salt Bae) joining the formalities at the climax of a World Cup.

The fuss over who succeeds Gary Lineker as presenter of BBC's *Match of the Day* feeds into a much greater issue: What does football expect of

TV? What do fans expect of football on TV? What does TV demand of football and what are the consequences, domestically and globally?

Lineker has enjoyed a remarkable 25 years fronting *Match of the Day*; he is probably now better known for his TV work than for a splendid playing career that brought 48 goals in 80 England games. Along the way, he attracted the opprobrium of centre-right media for political opinions that frightened BBC bosses in nervous thrall to a debate over the future of the licence fee. But he also built a far more lucrative podcast empire to accompany his £1.35 million salary – an income probably far below others paid through production company anonymity.

All goes to show just how crucial TV has become to the financial structures of domestic and international football.

Years ago Silvio Berlusconi – then revelling in the glory of being Milan owner and TV pioneer before politics took over – told this writer how fans would one day need to be let in for free to create match atmosphere. Similarly Michel Platini, in his pomp as UEFA president, fretted about how club football would survive if, following lavish spending, oligarchs such as Roman Abramovich walked away; now Gianni Infantino, all-powerful for the time being as FIFA president, frets about how football would survive if the media giants turn up a new toy.

Infantino appears to have taken TV companies' lack of interest in the expanded Club World Cup as a personal slight rather than as a sign of long-term times.

According to UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin, competition expansion is due to a vicious circle. "If we were to reduce the number of matches, we would see a drop in players' salaries, as clubs would have less revenue," he said. "It's a vicious circle. If we reduce the number of matches, salaries will have to be reduced as well. There is no other solution."

The current global value of TV football rights has been assessed at $19.2 billion, which account for one third of the value of sports media rights in general. The Premier League is the most valuable domestic football competition, generating $3.9bn per season across domestic and international markets.

However, the Premier League's overall TV income has held steady only at the cost of screening more matches, hence the value-per-match is sinking and no one knows how digital developments will affect market value in the years to come.

This brings us back to Lineker and *Match of the Day*. A new four-year deal for the BBC to air Premier League highlights begins next season and, as he noted: "I think they're looking to do *Match of the Day* slightly differently, so it makes sense for someone else to take the helm."

Precisely what "differently" means will be revealed in due course but the new deal includes new digital rights for all the BBC's online platforms. Either way, the world of football coverage is changing for both broadcasters and viewers.

TV is greedy. It's all about the ratings. Novelty and innovation: hence Noel Gallagher. TV cameras already scan the tunnel before kick-off; expect them to transmit from the tunnel after the final whistle as well. Into the dressing-rooms? Not yet. But one day in one form or another.

This is how football must keep conceding ground so that the TV cash flows on, albeit not increasing. Infantino sees this on his international spreadsheet with its matrix of TV income and 211 members, a majority of whom depend on FIFA largesse for their survival. Each federation can claim up to $8m-a-year for development activities under the terms of the Forward Development Programme. Not difficult to see how such generosity generates thanks reflected in votes.

Thus Ceferin's "vicious circle" keeps football TV programmes like *Match of the Day* rolling and the likes of Lineker and his successors on screen and in work.

The doomsayers have been out in force for years. Former FIFA executive Jerome Champagne has railed for years at the ever widening chasm between the haves and the have-nots, which served as a precursor for both Florentino Perez's botched Super League attempt and Ceferin's expanded Champions League format in response.

The game Kenneth Wolstenholme knew was all over a long time ago. The Lineker story shines a light on the changing face of TV football, in more ways than one.

A different era...iconic commentator Kenneth Wolstenholme

BOOKS THIS MONTH

VIVA COLOMBIA
By Mark Biram
(Pitch Publishing, £18.99)

Viva Colombia offers a social history of Colombian football through 15 distinct episodes and 15 national team players – from the *joie de vivre* of the Colombian style, best personified by Carlos Valderrama, to the travails of Colombian society illustrated by the tragic murder of Andres Escobar. From Colombia's first World Cup appearance in 1962 through to the present day, it considers what some of the most emblematic players to wear the shirt tells us about the South American nation.

WORK & PLAY
By Dave Proudlove
(Pitch Publishing, £16.99)

Work and Play: The Industrial Roots of English Football is a fascinating examination of the roots of some of English football's most famous clubs, and how the relationship between industrial communities and football clubs still survives at a local level throughout the semi-professional and grassroots game.

Jonathan WILSON
TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

The perils of three at the back

Premier League history shows that adopting a back three will not be easy for Ruben Amorim at Manchester United

When Chelsea won the Premier League under Antonio Conte in 2016-17, they became the first team since Everton in 1962-63 to win the English league title while using a back three as a default. As tactics have become more flexible, there have been champions since who have used a back three in certain games or in certain parts of certain games, but no side with a regular back three has won the league. Which is intriguing in itself, but of particular relevance in relation to Manchester United's appointment of Ruben Amorim.

Amorim, both at Braga and at Sporting, has favoured a 3-4-3 system. He has two basic ways of playing it. At times, he has used two holding players protecting the three defenders, with wing-backs supplying the width and what are essentially inside-forwards supporting a central striker – much like Conte did. But at other times, he has used a diamond in midfield with width being offered by the outside players in the front three. United's squad, in truth, doesn't look ideally suited to either option and so, at least in the final months of this season, there is going to have to be a process of adaptation.

New United boss ...Ruben Amorim

Who can play as the wing-backs? Diogo Dalot is more than capable on either side, but who plays on the other? Tyrell Malacia or Luke Shaw, when fit, could certainly fill the void on the left, while in Amorim's first few games Amad Diallo, a natural attacker, played as the right wing-back. Another question is where does Bruno Fernandes fit? He would probably prefer to be at the tip of the midfield diamond, but that means two forwards would have to stay wide. Alejandro Garnacho may be quite happy doing that, but it doesn't seem a natural fit for, say, Marcus Rashford, who could also be used as the central striker as an alternative to Joshua Zirkzee or Rasmus Hojlund. But the bigger question, perhaps, is why the back three has so rarely worked in England.

> That's perhaps why the back three has not been more successful in English football; the demands of stamina are greater in the Premier League than anywhere else

Conte's system used very attacking wing-backs in Victor Moses and Marcos Alonso, their surges forward opening up the space for Eden Hazard and Pedro to drift into the awkward three-quarter spaces that are so hard to pick up. Nemanja Matic and N'Golo Kante then blocked up the midfield, providing a screen for a back three that, in Cesar Azpilicueta and, especially, David Luiz, had players capable of stepping forward if required.

That defensive 3-2 trapezium is the basic building block of most systems looking to guard against the counter-attack; the 3-4-2-1 that Conte favoured that season offers that automatically, while also getting those inside forwards into dangerous areas. So why is it not used more? And why did Conte the following season begin to switch to more of a 3-5-2 or 3-5-1-1?

The problem, perhaps, is twofold. Firstly, the 3-2 defensive shape, while offering solidity, might almost be too solid. It makes a team very difficult to counter against, but it also makes them predictable which is a problem for sides expected to take the initiative. They have their base and they have their two creators to play on it; the options for inter-movement are limited. Conte, it should be remembered, made the switch to 3-4-2-1 in desperation with his side 3-0 down at half-time against Arsenal; he needed to shore things up to avoid embarrassment. But it turned out that basic structure was very effective, perhaps catching opponents unaware precisely because of the circumstances in which it was introduced midway through a season. By the following campaign, rivals had worked out how to deal with Pedro and Hazard, the inside forwards, and their awkward positioning.

At the same time, there is an extraordinary burden placed on the wing-backs to cover the entirety of their flanks. They have to make supporting runs to help the inside-forwards but also to cover back so the wide

Title winner... Antonio Conte is the only manager to win a Premier League title playing with a back three

centre-backs aren't pulled too wide. Mauricio Pochettino acknowledged the issue at Tottenham, effectively having two players on either side, switching constantly between them rather than risking burnout. Given the pace of the Premier League, that's perhaps why the back three has not been more successful in English football; the demands of stamina are greater in the Premier League than anywhere else.

None of which is to say that Amorim is doomed to failure. Any plan is better than no plan: getting the club en masse pulling in the same direction would be a huge step forwards. And modern systems are much more flexible than they were in the past. Players are quite comfortable stepping up into midfield from a four to create a back three, or dropping back between the central defenders to do so. There's no reason why players from the back three can't similarly step into midfield, creating overloads and changing angles. Equally, there are ways of mitigating the workload of the wing-backs.

But it is to say that there are reasons why the back three has tended not to work in England, why for elite clubs expected to make the running in games it can lead to inflexibility and predictability. It's not the biggest hurdle Amorim will have to overcome at United, but it's something to consider.

Conte's Chelsea 2016-17

Courtois
Azpilicueta, Luiz, Cahill
Moses, Kante, Matic, Alonso
Pedro, Hazard
Costa

Amorim's Sporting 2024-25

Israel
Debast, Diomande, Inacio
Quenda, Hjulmand, Braganca, Catamo
Trincao, Pote
Gyokeres

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Match delayed... a water sprinkler goes off next to Brazil forward Luiz Henrique

1 A SPRINKLE OF CHICANERY

During November's 2026 World Cup qualifying action in South America, ten-man Venezuela held on to secure a vital draw at home to Brazil – but they needed a bit of help from the groundsman to get it. As the visitors chased a stoppage-time winner, the ground's sprinklers emerged to water the pitch, forcing the referee to pause the match and forcing a furious reaction from the Brazilian players.

2 EASY COME, EASY GO

Italian football clubs are known for their limited patience when it comes to head coaches, but Piacenza took that to new levels when they sacked one manager on the same day they had hired him. Simone Bentivoglio had just taken his first and only training session when he was given his marching orders, with the Serie D club hiring Stefano Rossini – who they had only sacked a month earlier – to replace him.

3 MAN AGAINST BOYS

Kostas Manolas' most famous goal is the one he notched in the dying moments of Roma's remarkable comeback against Barcelona in the 2017-18 Champions League quarter-final, but these days he is aiming for quantity rather than quality. The former Greece centre-back, who returned to his hometown club Pannaxiakos after leaving Salernitana in the summer, has been re-deployed as a striker in the Greek fourth tier to devastating effect. On his debut, the 33-year-old scored five goals in 34 minutes before being taken off in an eventual 12-1 win, and added four more in his next three appearances.

4 FALSE ARDA ALARM

Juventus were forced to clarify that they had not signed a Real Madrid wonderkid after their social media account was hacked. Fans of the Old Lady were briefly thrilled when their club's English language account on X posted: "Welcome to Juventus, Arda Guler. The rising star of football is now part of the Juventus family." But, quickly responding from their Italian account, Juve admitted that their security had been "compromised" and that fans should ignore the "false information" published.

5 SUITCASE SECRETS

The methods of England's 1966 World Cup-winning manager Alf Ramsey were revealed after a suitcase filled with a bundle of his old papers was put up for auction. It contained scouting reports from then-Manchester United manager Matt Busby, proposals for how much the players should take in bonuses should they win the World Cup, plus meticulous details as to how the squad should behave and be treated while on international duty. Expected to fetch between £1,000 and £1,500, the suitcase was eventually sold for £17,064.

6 REAL DEALS

Speaking of football items up for auction, Real Madrid have cashed in on their old changing room lockers, which were removed from the Bernabeu at the end of the 2021-22 season. With the iconic stadium under renovation, Madrid put 24 of the full-size lockers up for sale for between £10,000 and £15,000 each. The differing values reflected the status of the players to have occupied it, with #5 (Zinedine Zidane), #9 (Ronaldo) and #10 (Luis Figo, Luka Modric) among those particularly in demand. Cristiano Ronaldo's famous #7, however, went straight to the club museum instead.

Up for sale...Real Madrid's lockers

OBITUARIES

Algerian hero... Mekhloufi in action for Saint-Etienne

Rachid MEKHLOUFI (1936-2024)
Aside from being a prolific goalscorer in France for Saint-Etienne, Mekhloufi was also a key figure in Algeria's independence movement.

In April 1958, less than a year after firing *Les Verts* to the Ligue 1 crown, he left France to play for the FLN, a team put together by the National Liberation Front, which represented Algeria's independence movement.

They toured the world playing club and international opponents, despite FIFA refusing to recognise the team. In total, they played an estimated 83 matches, often attracting massive crowds, of which Mekhloufi played 40 and scored 42 goals.

When Algeria gained independence in 1962, the FLN was disbanded and succeeded by a FIFA-recognised team. Mekhloufi – who had won four France caps and gave up the chance to play at the 1958 World Cup – went on to win ten caps for Algeria, scoring five goals.

After independence, he joined Servette in Switzerland before returning to Saint-Etienne, winning three more Ligue 1 crowns and a French Cup and becoming the club's record goalscorer (a record later broken by Herve Revelli).

Later, he managed Algeria twice, winning a gold medal at the 1978 All-Africa Games and then assisting at their first World Cup finals appearance in 1982.

Bernard CHIARELLI (1934-2024)
A member of the France squad that finished third at the 1958 World Cup. Played his club football for Valenciennes, Lens, Lille, Sedan and Le Havre.

Vicente DE LA MATA (1944-2024)
Son of one of Argentina's greatest players in the 1940s, De la Mata enjoyed a fine career in his own right, winning three league titles and the Copa Libertadores twice with Independiente.

John DEMPSEY (1946-2024)
Dempsey was a resolute centre-back who scored only seven goals in 207 matches for Chelsea but two of them were crucial. One helped beat Crystal Palace in a fifth-round tie en route to winning the 1970 FA Cup and the other propelled them to a 2-1 replay victory over Real Madrid in the next season's European Cup Winners' Cup final.

He began at Fulham and ended his career with Philadelphia Fury after being voted the NASL's best defender ahead of Franz Beckenbauer, while he also won 16 caps for Republic of Ireland.

Helmut DUCKADAM (1959-2024)
Nicknamed "The Hero of Seville" for his display in Steaua Bucharest's victory over Barcelona in the 1986 European Cup final when he saved four penalties in the shootout. He came eighth in that year's Ballon d'Or voting, yet only won two Romania caps, both in 1982.

Jose GARRIDO (1960-2024)
Benfica and Boavista centre-back who then undertook a successful coaching career with clubs in Portugal, Malaysia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

One-cap wonder... Ze Carlos at France '98

ZE CARLOS (1967-2024)
Jose Carlos de Almeida played just once for Brazil in remarkable circumstances. His first-ever senior international came in the 1998 World Cup semi-final against the Netherlands at right-back in place of the suspended Cafu. Brazil won on penalties and Cafu returned for the final.

Coskun TAS (1935-2024)
The striker won two Turkish league titles with Besiktas after moving to Istanbul to study, then represented the national team that reached the World Cup finals for the first time in 1954.

Michael OSEI (1971-2024)
Osei played alongside cousin Tony Yeboah at Okwawu United then won the Ghana league twice as a midfielder with Asante Kotoko. He moved to Austria's Vorwarts Steyr in 1992 and teamed up again briefly with Yeboah at Eintracht Frankfurt. Later returned home to coach Asante Kotoko to various successes.

Copa Sudamericana winner...Angulo won the trophy in 2022

Marco ANGULO (2002-2024)
The midfielder won the Under-20 Copa Libertadores, a league title and the Copa Sudamericana with Independiente del Valle, and played twice for Ecuador. One season in MLS with FC Cincinnati was followed by a loan to LDU Quito.

Frank "Eddy" SCHAFFER (1952-2024)
Central defender Schaffer followed up his footballing success with a popular singing career. In the 1970s, under Hennes Weisweiler and then Udo Lattek at Borussia Monchengladbach, Schaffer won two UEFA Cups. He was also a stalwart in the team that finished runners-up to Liverpool in the 1977 European Cup final alongside the likes of Rainer Bonhof, Berti Vogts, Jupp Heynckes, Allan Simonsen and Uli Stielike. Later he was lead singer with his band Eddy and the News.

Luis Ernesto TAPIA (1944-2024)
Tapia ranks as perhaps Panama's greatest player, a forward who scored 20 goals in 77 games between 1963 and 1979. The so-called "Central-American Pele" played his club football in El Salvador, winning league titles with Alianza as well as the CONCACAF Champions Cup in 1967.

Bernd BAUCHSPIESS (1939-2024)
Ex-Chemie Leipzig striker who won one cap for East Germany in 1959 but was recalled five years later to the GDR squad that won bronze at the 1964 Olympics (officially as a unified German team).

Trygve BORNO (1942-2024)
Borno played 43 times in midfield for Norway between 1966 and 1972 and was a league champion with Skeid Oslo.

Jan FURTOK (1962-2024)
Furtok, scorer of ten goals in 36 matches for Poland, began and ended his career with GKS Katowice, having spent seven years in between in Germany with Hamburg and Eintracht Frankfurt.

Andrzej SYKTA (1940-2024)
The right-winger had played only 13 top-tier matches with Wislaw Krakow when he scored on his Poland debut in a 6-2 win over Finland in 1959. Won the Polish Cup in 1967, before winding down his career in the French lower leagues.

Hugo VILLAVERDE (1954-2024)
Argentina central defender of six caps, who won six national and international trophies with Independiente.

Kalambay OTEPA (1948-2024)
A goalkeeping reserve in the Zaire squad that infamously crashed out of the 1974 World Cup. Won the African Champions Cup twice with TP Mazembe.

Hassan AKESBI (1934-2024)
Scored over 100 goals for French club Nimes between 1955 and 1961, before winning Ligue 1 in 1962 with Reims. His international career with Morocco was limited and he retired just before their first World Cup finals appearance in Mexico in 1970, but is still regarded as one of the country's greats.

Words by Keir Radnedge & Mark Gleeson

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

SEASON RANKINGS
Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Caoimhin Kelleher (Liverpool)	3
Emiliano Martinez (Aston Villa)	3
Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich)	3
David Raya (Arsenal)	3
David De Gea (Fiorentina)	2
Michele Di Gregorio (Juventus)	2
Peter Gulacsi (RB Leipzig)	2
Franco Israel (Sporting)	2
Jan Oblak (Atletico Madrid)	2
Inaki Pena (Barcelona)	2
Matz Sels (Nottingham Forest)	2
Yann Sommer (Internazionale)	2
Alisson (Liverpool)	1
Marco Carnesecchi (Atalanta)	1
Mike Maignan (Milan)	1
Alex Meret (Napoli)	1
Vanja Milinkovic-Savic (Torino)	1

DEFENDERS

Virgil van Dijk (Liverpool)	15
Giovanni Di Lorenzo (Napoli)	9
Willi Orban (RB Leipzig)	6
Federico Dimarco (Internazionale)	5
Gabriel (Arsenal)	5
Bremer (Juventus)	4
Josko Gvardiol (Manchester City)	4
Kim Min-jae (Bayern Munich)	4
Ibrahima Konate (Liverpool)	4
William Saliba (Arsenal)	4
Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool)	3
Riccardo Calafiori (Arsenal)	3
Pau Cubarsi (Barcelona)	3
Ruben Dias (Manchester City)	3
Eder Militao (Real Madrid)	3
Alex Grimaldo (Bayer Leverkusen)	3
Isak Hien (Atalanta)	3
Ramy Bensebaini (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Conor Bradley (Liverpool)	2
Alessandro Buongiorno (Napoli)	2
Dani Carvajal (Real Madrid)	2
Alphonso Davies (Bayern Munich)	2
Lucas Digne (Aston Villa)	2
Jose Maria Gimenez (Atletico Madrid)	2
Achraf Hakimi (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
Marcos Llorente (Atletico Madrid)	2
Inigo Martinez (Barcelona)	2
Andy Robertson (Liverpool)	2
Antonio Rudiger (Real Madrid)	2
Alessandro Bastoni (Internazionale)	1
Juan Cabal (Juventus)	1
Andrea Cambiaso (Juventus)	1
Stefan de Vrij (Internazionale)	1
Dodo (Fiorentina)	1
Denzel Dumfries (Internazionale)	1
Federico Gatti (Juventus)	1
Robin Gosens (Fiorentina)	1
Raphael Guerreiro (Bayern Munich)	1
Caio Henrique (Monaco)	1
Theo Hernandez (Milan)	1
Jules Kounde (Barcelona)	1
Clement Lenglet (Atletico Madrid)	1
Ferland Mendy (Real Madrid)	1
Pedro Porro (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
David Raum (RB Leipzig)	1
Nico Schlotterbeck (Borussia Dortmund)	1
John Stones (Manchester City)	1
Nicolas Tagliafico (Lyon)	1
Jurrien Timber (Arsenal)	1
Pau Torres (Aston Villa)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Cole Palmer (Chelsea)	12
Ryan Gravenberch (Liverpool)	9
Jamal Musiala (Bayern Munich)	9
Florian Wirtz (Bayer Leverkusen)	7
Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich)	4
Pedri (Barcelona)	4
Charles De Ketelaere (Atalanta)	3
Michael Olise (Bayern Munich)	3
Tijjani Reijnders (Milan)	3
Federico Valverde (Real Madrid)	3
Marc Casado (Barcelona)	2
Marten de Roon (Atalanta)	2
Davide Frattesi (Internazionale)	2
Giovani Lo Celso (Real Betis)	2
Moises Caicedo (Chelsea)	1
Angel Di Maria (Benfica)	1
Fermin Lopez (Barcelona)	1
Enzo Fernandez (Chelsea)	1
Phil Foden (Manchester City)	1
Morten Hjulmand (Sporting)	1
Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg (Marseille)	1
Stanislav Lobotka (Napoli)	1
Alexis Mac Allister (Liverpool)	1
James Maddison (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Matheus Nunes (Manchester City)	1
Martin Odegaard (Arsenal)	1
Aleksandar Pavlovic (Bayern Munich)	1
Adrien Rabiot (Marseille)	1
Rodri (Manchester City)	1
Bernardo Silva (Manchester City)	1
Malik Tillman (PSV)	1
Lucas Torreira (Galatasaray)	1
Hans Vanaken (Club Brugge)	1
Joey Veerman (PSV)	1
Piotr Zielinski (Internazionale)	1

FORWARDS

Robert Lewandowski (Barcelona)	19
Harry Kane (Bayern Munich)	15
Erling Haaland (Manchester City)	10
Mohamed Salah (Liverpool)	10
Raphinha (Barcelona)	9
Omar Marmoush (Eintracht Frankfurt)	8
Viktor Gyokeres (Sporting)	7
Lamine Yamal (Barcelona)	6
Vinicius Junior (Real Madrid)	5
Kerem Akturkoglu (Benfica)	3
Bradley Barcola (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Cody Gakpo (Liverpool)	3
Khvicha Kvaratskhelia (Napoli)	3
Ademola Lookman (Atalanta)	3
Mateo Retegui (Atalanta)	3
Bukayo Saka (Arsenal)	2
Jamie Gittens (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Kai Havertz (Arsenal)	1
Joao Pedro (Brighton & Hove Albion)	1
Samu Omorodion (Porto)	1
Lois Openda (RB Leipzig)	1
Christian Pulisic (Milan)	1
Giuliano Simeone (Atletico Madrid)	1
Marcus Thuram (Internazionale)	1

ESM MEMBERS:
A Bola (Portugal), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (Italy), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *De Telegraaf* (Netherlands), *Tipsbladet* (Denmark), *ELF Voetbal* (Netherlands), *World Soccer* (England)

"Joining San Diego FC as a partner is an exciting opportunity to help build something truly special in a city and league that are experiencing incredible growth"

Ex-Spain midfielder Juan Mata announces that he will join the ownership group of MLS's newest club San Diego FC

12 MOVES *you might have missed…*

TRANSFERS ★ LOANS ★ SACKINGS ★ HIRINGS ★ SWITCHES ★ RETIREMENTS

MARCELO

Almost exactly a year after winning the Copa Libertadores, the former Real Madrid and Brazil left-back had his **Fluminense** contract terminated by mutual consent.

Claudio RANIERI

The 73-year-old came out of retirement to take charge of **Roma** for the third time. The is the club's third manager of the season after Daniele De Rossi and Ivan Juric.

Frank LAMPARD

In his first permanent role since being sacked by Everton in January 2023, the ex-England midfielder took charge of Championship side **Coventry City**.

Patrick VIEIRA

The Frenchman, who departed Ligue 1 outfit Strasbourg in the summer, took charge of Serie A strugglers **Genoa** to replace Alberto Gilardino.

Javier MASCHERANO

Following the departure of Gerardo Martino after **Inter Miami**'s failure to progress through the MLS play-offs, Mascherano left Argentina's Under-20s to take the role.

Makram DABOUB

The Tunisian stepped down as **Palestine** manager after three years in charge, despite impressing in the Asian Cup and in World Cup qualifying (*more on page 46*).

Christian ILZER

Last season's title-winning manager with Sturm Graz left the Austrian side to take charge of German strugglers **Hoffenheim**, following the sacking of Pellegrino Matarazzo.

Ruud VAN NISTELROOY

Following a short spell as caretaker manager at Manchester United, the former PSV coach was appointed by **Leicester City** after the Foxes parted company with Steve Cooper.

Age HAREIDE

The 71-year-old Norwegian stepped down from his role as head coach of **Iceland** and announced his retirement from football after a 39-year managerial career.

Patrick VAN AANHOLT

The former Sunderland, Crystal Palace, PSV and Netherlands left-back joined **Sparta Rotterdam** as a free agent, five months after being released by Galatasaray.

John CARVER

Polish side **Lechia Gdansk** hired the Scotland assistant manager as head coach. He will continue in his current role until after the March international break.

Bafetimbi GOMIS

A prolific scorer for Saint-Etienne, Lyon, Swansea, Marseille, Galatasaray and Al Hilal, the striker announced his retirement shortly after leaving Japanese side **Kawasaki Frontale**.

"Edoardo [Bove] is doing well, he is recovering and we are happy"

Fiorentina confirm that midfielder Edoardo Bove is out of intensive care after the 22-year-old collapsed on the pitch during the Serie A clash with Internazionale

The month in numbers

The facts and stats that have caught our eye in the world of football this month...

4
The number of co-hosting nations of Euro 2028 – England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland – after Northern Ireland formally withdrew, with plans to refurbish their proposed stadium Casement Park now shelved.

40
Age of LAFC striker Kei Kamara when he came out of international retirement to play for Sierra Leona in their penultimate AFCON 2025 qualifier versus Chad in November.

67
Years since the last player to net a hat-trick of penalties in the English top flight before Bournemouth's Dutch forward Justin Kluivert achieved the feat in their Premier League clash against Wolves.

58
Assists that Lionel Messi has registered for Argentina, matching the all-time men's international record held by the United States legend Landon Donovan.

Record-equalling ...Leo Messi set up Lautaro Martinez in the win over Peru

2026
Year that Paul Pogba's Juventus contract was due to expire, until it was terminated in November. The French midfielder, who recently had a doping ban reduced, is looking for a new club ahead of a return to football in March 2025.

Copa do Brasil ...Flamengo lift the cup

5
Brazilian Cups won by Flamengo after they lifted the 2024 trophy just a month after the arrival of their new coach, ex-Chelsea and Atletico Madrid left-back Filipe Luis.

3
Women's Under-17 World Cups won by North Korea, more than any other country, after they lifted the 2024 trophy in November.

1
Angola international defender Bastos became the first African player to win South America's elite continental club competition after claiming the Copa Libertadores with Brazilian club Botafogo.

4
Barcelona stars that have won the Golden Boy award, given to Europe's best young player, after Lamine Yamal followed Leo Messi, Pedri and Gavi in collecting the honour. No club has had more winners.

5
MLS clubs that veteran American coach Bruce Arena has managed, after the 73-year-old took charge of San Jose Earthquakes at the end of the 2024 campaign.

3
Tier of Danish football that Helsingor play in – the club that has just been bought by retired Spanish midfielder Andres Iniesta.

36.74
Speed registered in kilometres per hour by Bochum winger Gerrit Holtmann, the fastest-ever recorded in German Bundesliga history.

$780m
Estimated cost of New York City FC's new stadium, Etihad Park, for which construction began in December. It is expected to be completed in time for the 2027 campaign.

3
Players to have scored a century of UEFA Champions League goals after Robert Lewandowski joined Cristiano Ronaldo and Messi in passing the historic milestone.

UCL centurion ...Lewandowski

43
Total number of games it took for Harry Kane to smash home 50 Bundesliga goals, taking him ahead of Erling Haaland – previously 50 in 50 – as the quickest player to reach the tally.

20
Sierra Leone caps won by former Tottenham, Queens Park Rangers and Liverpool centre-back Steven Caulker, who announced his retirement from international football in November aged 32.

60
Minutes that Tottenham Hotspur's Italian goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario played with a broken ankle in the North London club's Premier League meeting with Manchester City, following a clash with Savinho.

Broken ankle ...Tottenham's Vicario receives treatment

5
Consecutive defeats suffered by Manchester City in all competitions in October and November, the worst losing streak of Pep Guardiola's entire managerial career.

47
League titles won by Olimpia – 13 more than nearest rivals Cerro Porteno – after the Paraguayan side won the 2024 Clausura.

A full review of South America's domestic leagues will follow in next month's edition.

eyewitness

Carl Worswick reports

COLOMBIA

Striking gold

How Aston Villa and Colombia striker Jhon Duran went from a small mining town to the Champions League spotlight

Gently stirring his thick black coffee in the stuffy back-room office of his funeral parlour, Mario Galeano's pinched eyes quiver as his memory wanders back to the phone call he believes helped turn Jhon Jader Duran's life. "I told his mother this could be everything, or this could be nothing," Galeano, Duran's former coach, recalls, "but that we had to give it a go; he had to leave Zaragoza and go to Medellin."

With his mother's blessing, the next day Galeano and Duran left Zaragoza, a rugged rural gold-mining town where the 11-year-old had spent his entire life, on the six-hour drive to Medellin. There, flitting across Colombia's second city from trial to trial, Galeano and Duran would spend the next month chasing a dream that held no guarantee of success.

This hadn't been Galeano's original plan. When his *Casa de Paz* (House of Peace) funeral parlour opened its own football school in Zaragoza a year earlier at the end of 2013, the goal had been to build a team around Duran to compete at the world-renowned Pony Futbol championships. The annual junior football event had been used as a launch pad for the careers of many of Colombia's most famous footballers from Luis Perea and Radamel Falcao to James Rodriguez and Juan Fernando Quintero. It was the shop window where every young Colombian footballer needed to be.

But those hopes were soon dashed. Duran had lost his cool in the 2014 qualifying rounds, seeing red for mouthing off at the referee with his team 3-0 down in a quarter-final match. "It was our first major tournament and we hadn't had time to gel. Jhon was our best player but he couldn't handle losing," Galeano smirks, slurping on his coffee. "He always was super competitive."

Galeano's team, playing under the Zaragoza municipality's name, had failed to qualify for the finals and the young striker was slapped with a seven-match ban. "He was devastated," Galeano admits. "Inconsolable."

Across Medellin, team after team baulked at signing a player with such a lengthy suspension. But then came Envigado. Formed in 1989, the club had begun establishing a strong reputation for nurturing talent, like James, Quintero and Fredy Guarin, who all began their careers at the team's *Cantera de Heroes* (Heroes Youth Academy) before being sold to Europe. When Duran turned up for trials one bright December morning, again the ban hung heavily around his neck. But, with the team's owner watching from the stands, the left-footer went on to blow everyone away.

"Sometimes opportunities appear in the worst of moments," Galeano reflects. "Jhon always believed in himself. That day he turned it on when it mattered."

Where it all began... Duran's local pitch in his hometown of Zaragoza, Colombia

Betano
Calvin Klein

Galeano, himself a former amateur footballer, had seen Duran's talent blossom in the year he'd spent nurturing his game. Initially gangly and too left-footed, one asset had nonetheless stood out: his mental strength. "He had this winning mentality. His desire to win, to compete. Nothing seemed to faze him," Galeano recalls.

It was his aunt Olga who had first noticed there was something different about Duran. A teacher at Jhon's primary school, he had caught her eye playing out on the concrete court one lunchtime when he was about six years old. "I immediately told his dad, Regino, that there was something a bit special about him," Olga smiles. "From then on, his life was football, football and nothing else."

If Duran wasn't at home, he was out on one of the two pitches in the neighbourhood. "Just walking down the street he'd be practising his headers with an imaginary ball," Olga laughs. "In his head, he was always playing a game."

When one particular night young Jhon was late returning home, the family knew where to look. Yet he wasn't on either of the local fields. It was after 11pm and with the family worried sick, news arrived that he'd been spotted playing up on Esmeraldas, a pitch located out of town, invited up there by the older boys. "He hadn't eaten and he'd had nothing to drink," auntie Olga recalls. "He knew he was in trouble, but had still wanted to keep playing!"

Jhon's childhood had been happy, out booting a ball by himself or with his mates, but life in Zaragoza was tough, uncompromising and violent. Colombia's social conflict had battered the town for decades. Right-wing paramilitaries, left-wing guerrilla groups, criminal gangs and drug traffickers had all fought for control over the strategic area and its surrounding mineral wealth. As power was wrested from one group to another, innocent people fell through the cracks. Two of his uncles had been murdered, childhood friends suddenly disappeared and, in a town of few opportunities, others were tricked by the bewitching gleam of fast-cash and illegality. For most though, it was simply a struggle to survive.

A short ride out of town, the earth's gold-veined scars glint in the afternoon sun. Duran's dad, a gold-miner, was often away for long periods working in the mines. Sometimes Regino would come back with empty pockets, covered in mud and exhausted by the hard labour. Over breakfast in a cafe that sits on the muddy River Nechi, his father looks back on those days of sacrifice.

The house that built Duran...where the young striker grew up

"Jhon was always a challenge," he grimaces while crunching on his fried-fish breakfast. "We always struggled to scrape together enough money for food, for his bus fares, for the many football boots he went through. The instability was very difficult."

As well as money, food too had been a thorny issue for Jhon as a young child. "When Envigado made him the offer, they wanted him to go and live at the club. I told them that was never going to happen," Regino said. "He didn't like food and we had to force him to eat, so I needed someone I could trust to look after his diet."

His dad had told Mario they should return to Zaragoza at once, potentially scuppering his career from ever getting started. Yet a compromise was eventually struck. Along with his older cousin, Andres Felipe, himself a budding

San Gregorio... Duran's old stomping ground is now used by his foundation

footballer who would go on to play in Honduras, the pair would live with Regino's sister Ana, who lived in neighbouring Medellin. Envigado agreed.

It was there that Duran found the perfect environment to thrive. A club with a clear pathway into the first team, during his first year with the Under-12s Galeano went to see him play the league final in which Envigado were crowned champions. "I've seen kids with a lot of talent who threw it all away," Galeano recalls. "I've seen less talented kids who have made a success of it through sheer discipline, effort and sacrifice. It was clear that Jhon Jader had both qualities."

A year later, and with his suspension served, Duran played the Pony Futbol tournament for Envigado in the same team as future Colombia team-mate Yaser Asprilla. Shortly after, having now progressed into the Under-15s, he went into the last game of the season trailing Tomas Angel, son of Juan Pablo, by three goals in the regional goalscoring charts.

"The night before we were up until 2am on the PlayStation," smirks Andres Felipe. "When he finally went to bed, he began talking in his sleep: 'One-two! Swing a cross in! I'm here, back post!'"

The following day, captain Duran bagged four goals to pip Angel junior as the league's top goalscorer. Once again, Envigado were champions. It was the start of something special.

Two months after his 15th birthday, his big moment arrived. Then-Envigado manager Eduardo Lara had been closely monitoring the rookie striker's progress and thought the time was ripe to hand the teenager his professional debut. "As soon as he'd caught my eye, I had no doubt in bringing him into the first team," Lara revealed. Later that same year, aged 15 years and 263 days old, he became the second youngest goalscorer in Colombian top-flight history.

Since then, the whirlwind ride hasn't stopped. Called up to the Colombia Under-17s at 15, he was quickly promoted to the Under-20s aged just 16 before being named on *The Guardian's* Best 60 Young Talents in the World list in 2020. Not long later, Chicago Fire came knocking.

> "We always struggled to scrape together enough money for food, for his bus fares, for the many football boots he went through"
>
> **Duran's father Regino**

"He had two offers: one from Chicago and another from Bayer Leverkusen, who had followed his progress ever since Pony. But they wanted to keep him in Colombia," Andres Felipe explains. His uncle, Oswaldo, who had been a professional goalkeeper and later helped coach Duran in his early days at Envigado, was hesitant about a move to MLS. "Oswaldo felt he could go straight to Europe, but I told Jhon the best offer is the one you have in your hand," auntie Olga advised.

At first, it took Duran a while to settle. A new culture, learning a new language and the chilly bite of the Illinois winter all took their toll when Duran finally joined the Major League Soccer club as the league's youngest foreign signing at the end of 2021.

But once he got going, it was clear he wouldn't be in the States for long.

Young Duran... Jhon (far right) with his Casa de Paz team-mates

Early days... Duran in action for Envigado

Still only 18, Duran scored eight times in 28 appearances before Aston Villa swooped with a bid of £14.75 million in January 2023. Sat shivering in the stands at Villa Park, he was welcomed to the club by former Villans favourite Juan Pablo Angel, whose pre-recorded video was beamed onto the stadium's big screen: "It's an enormous pleasure for me to welcome you to your new home."

Again, Duran took his time to adapt. But by the end of that first season, Villa fans had seen enough to sense they had a potential star on their books. Manager Unai Emery, who had made Duran his second Villa signing after joining the Birmingham club, was keen to spend the summer working with his new talent. But that meant choosing club over country. In the summer of 2023 Colombia were playing at the Under-20 World Cup finals and Duran was expected to be his country's starting striker. Just as he had had to sit out of the qualifiers, held on home soil while Duran sealed his move to Villa, he was now told he would also have to miss the finals. "Our idea is for him to stay with us. We want to work with him and for him to rest when we say he should," Emery explained. "His potential is really huge and our and my responsibility is to try to exploit that."

Striking gold...Duran celebrates scoring v Bayern Munich in the Champions League in October

Cafeteros front-man...Duran has 15 senior Colombia caps already, scoring two goals

Yet Duran was already knocking on the door of the Colombia seniors. In a friendly against Guatemala almost a year before the Under-20s finals, Duran was handed his first international cap when he came on as a half-time substitute for Radamel Falcao. Whether Nestor Lorenzo had intended this to be a symbolic moment, the seamless changing of the guard from one generation to another, is unclear. But the former Swindon Town defender was willing to be patient with his raw star. Duran went on to score his first international goal for Colombia against Japan at the start of 2023, but there were still several strikers ahead of him in Lorenzo's plans.

Like at his club where he had wrangled restlessly with the notion of playing back-up to Ollie Watkins, Duran would also need to be patient at international level. Having provided one of the defining moments of Aston Villa's season after coming off the bench to score two late goals and secure a 3-3 draw against Liverpool, an invaluable point in their chase for a first-ever Champions League spot, Duran would then be picked for Colombia's Copa America squad only to feature just once as *Los Cafeteros* stormed their way to the final before losing to Argentina in extra-time.

> "For me, he's going to be the new Falcao"
> Colombian journalist Steven Arce

That same summer would also be marked by his half-baked attempts, impatience wrestling with immaturity, to leave Villa. But by the start of the new season, his foolish and pre-mature Hammers gesture was quickly forgotten.

Perhaps not even the indefatigably self-assured Duran would have expected what came next, though. His worldy strike against Everton was a Premier League Goal of the Season contender, and by the time of his indelible winner against Bayern Munich in the UEFA Champions League – yet another super-sub moment – at the start of October, he was already etched in the Villa history books. In the stands, 1982 European Cup hero Peter Withe was lifted to his feet. It was the Colombian's sixth goal of the season, all scored after coming off the bench.

"He's got the physical attributes and the attitude," glowed Colombian journalist Steven Arce after Duran hit Colombia's third goal in a 4-0 trouncing of Chile in a South American World Cup qualifier two weeks later. "For me, he's going to be the new Falcao."

It's easy to forget that Duran is still a young boy, only just turned 21; that just a few years ago, he was just another struggling kid from Colombia desperate to escape poverty and exclusion in an abandoned corner of the world. "We need to break this paradigm in our town after so many years of suffering," stresses his aunt Olga. "But there are always glimmers of hope that something positive will change. That's why the ball is such an important weapon."

Jhon Jader Duran Foundation

Born in February 2024 after his dad came up with the idea while watching his son play for Aston Villa on TV, the Jhon Jader Duran Foundation was officially launched with over 1,000 kids turning up for trials in Zaragoza, the town where the Villa player has spent more than half of his life.

Financed directly from Jhon Jader's own pocket, the foundation is aimed at "providing comprehensive development opportunities to children who come from impoverished backgrounds through football and culture."

Over 200 players aged five to 17 years old are currently signed up at the school that compete with other teams from across the Bajo Cauca region. They train and play on the same San Gregorio rock-and-dirt pitch where the town's most famous son once kicked a ball.

With plans to expand to over 400 players by reaching out beyond the town's borders, nine of the school's best players were recently invited for trials at Colombian giants America de Cali.

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World Soccer Awards 2024

THE RESULTS OF OUR 43RD ANNUAL AWARDS – AND THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED SHAPE THE GAME OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS

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Men's World Team of the Year...Spain

THE REIGN OF SPAIN

Spanish players, teams and managers dominate across the board

It may be over 14 years since Andres Iniesta scored the goal that made Spain world champions, but glancing around the footballing landscape in 2024, it is tempting to ask whether the country has ever been so dominant.

Looking at the results of this year's *World Soccer* awards, there are Spanish fingerprints everywhere. The Men and Women's Players of the Year, Rodri and

Aitana Bonmati, are both Spanish, while the second and third players in both votes play for Spanish clubs. The Men's Manager of the Year, Carlo Ancelotti, manages a Spanish club, and his three nearest challengers are all Spaniards. Barcelona Femeni won the Women's Team of the Year award, and the Men's award went to – yep, you guessed it – Spain.

Only Englishwoman Emma Hayes bucked the trend, winning the Women's Manager of the Year gong after claiming her seventh WSL title with Chelsea

Spanish football has never had it so good

before promptly winning the Olympics in her new job as manager of the United States women's national team. Her nearest challenger was ex-Barca Femeni boss Jonatan Giraldez.

Across the board – as players, managers and teams, at club and international level, in the men's and women's game – Spanish football has never had it so good.

It is not as if there was only one show in town. This was a footballing year packed with action, with international tournaments for every continent plus a club game packed with incredible storylines, giving the *World Soccer* voting panel plenty to consider.

Women's World Player of the Year...Aitana Bonmati

As always, we consulted a network of journalists, broadcasters and former players from around the world to help us find the outstanding players, teams and managers from the men's and women's game.

Each of our panel selected five players and, as is so often the case, their attention was drawn towards European champions. In the Men's awards, all of the top four players were part of teams that won European titles either for club or country.

Ultimately, it was a race between Rodri and Vinicius Junior. The fact that the Spaniard delivered for both club and country is perhaps what gave him the edge.

For the Women's awards, the winner was rarely in doubt. For the second year in a row, Bonmati was the runaway victor, becoming the first player in the short history of the award to win it twice.

In previous years, we asked each of

Previous World Player of the Year winners

1980s

1982 Paolo Rossi
Juventus & Italy
1983 Zico
Udinese & Brazil
1984 Michel Platini
Juventus & France
1985 Michel Platini
Juventus & France
1986 Diego Maradona
Napoli & Argentina
1987 Ruud Gullit
PSV/Milan & Netherlands
1988 Marco van Basten
Milan & Netherlands
1989 Ruud Gullit
Milan & Netherlands

1990s

1990 Lothar Matthaus
Internazionale & West Germany
1991 Jean-Pierre Papin
Marseille & France
1992 Marco van Basten
Milan & Netherlands
1993 Roberto Baggio
Juventus & Italy
1994 Paolo Maldini
Milan & Italy
1995 Gianluca Vialli
Juventus & Italy
1996 Ronaldo
PSV/Barcelona & Brazil
1997 Ronaldo
Barcelona/Internazionale & Brazil
1998 Zinedine Zidane
Juventus & France
1999 Rivaldo
Barcelona & Brazil

2000s

2000 Luis Figo
Barcelona/Real Madrid & Portugal
2001 Michael Owen
Liverpool & England
2002 Ronaldo
Internazionale/Real Madrid & Brazil
2003 Pavel Nedved
Juventus & Czech Republic
2004 Ronaldinho
Barcelona & Brazil
2005 Ronaldinho
Barcelona & Brazil
2006 Fabio Cannavaro
Juventus/Real Madrid & Italy
2007 Kaka
Milan & Brazil
2008 Cristiano Ronaldo
Manchester United & Portugal
2009 Lionel Messi
Barcelona & Argentina

2010s

2010 Xavi
Barcelona & Spain
2011 Lionel Messi
Barcelona & Argentina
2012 Lionel Messi
Barcelona & Argentina
2013 Cristiano Ronaldo
Real Madrid & Portugal
2014 Cristiano Ronaldo
Real Madrid & Portugal
2015 Lionel Messi
Barcelona & Argentina
2016 Cristiano Ronaldo
Real Madrid & Portugal
2017 Cristiano Ronaldo
Real Madrid & Portugal
2018 Luka Modric
Real Madrid & Croatia
2019 Lionel Messi
Barcelona & Argentina

Men's World Player of the Year...Rodri

our panel to name one Team and one Manager of the Year. This time, in order to cast a broader spotlight on some of the year's outstanding achievers, we asked for three of each.

As it turns out, that change cost Xabi Alonso the title of Men's Manager of the Year. The Bayer Leverkusen boss received more top votes than any other candidate, but was pipped to the award by Real Madrid's Ancelotti who received more votes overall. The Italian is the fourth man – after Alex Ferguson, Jose Mourinho and Pep Guardiola – to have been named *World Soccer* Manager of the Year more than once, 21 years after winning the award for the first time.

The change of process also allowed honourable mentions for some of the other continental champions of 2024 – Ivory Coast in Africa, Qatar in Asia and Argentina in South America – as well as some of the year's remarkable club stories.

But, in the end, this was Spain's year.

Jamie Evans

2020s

2020 Robert Lewandowski
Bayern Munich & Poland
2021 Robert Lewandowski
Bayern Munich & Poland
2022 Lionel Messi
Paris Saint-Germain & Argentina
2023 Erling Haaland
Manchester City & Norway

2024 WINNERS

MEN'S WORLD PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Rank	Name	Total
1	**Rodri** *Manchester City & Spain*	275
2	**Vinicius Junior** *Real Madrid & Brazil*	237
3	**Jude Bellingham** *Real Madrid & England*	139
4	**Lamine Yamal** *Barcelona & Spain*	98
5	**Erling Haaland** *Manchester City & Norway*	74
6	**Dani Carvajal** *Real Madrid & Spain*	52
7	**Lautaro Martinez** *Internazionale & Argentina*	34
8	**Harry Kane** *Bayern Munich & England*	29
9	**Toni Kroos** *Real Madrid & Germany*	16
10	**Florian Wirtz** *Bayer Leverkusen & Germany*	15
11	**Kylian Mbappe** *Paris Saint-Germain/Real Madrid & France*	12
12=	**Sebastien Haller** *B. Dortmund & Ivory Coast*	7
12=	**Lionel Messi** *Inter Miami & Argentina*	7
12=	**Cole Palmer** *Chelsea & England*	7
15	**Nico Williams** *Athletic Club & Spain*	4
16=	**Akram Afif** *Al Sadd & Qatar*	3
16=	**Mats Hummels** *B. Dortmund & Germany*	3
16=	**Soufiane Rahimi** *Al Ain & Morocco*	3
19=	**Phil Foden** *Manchester City & England*	2
19=	**Alex Grimaldo** *Bayer Leverkusen & Spain*	2
19=	**Robert Lewandowski** *Barcelona & Poland*	2
19=	**Ademola Lookman** *Atalanta & Nigeria*	2
19=	**Martin Odegaard** *Arsenal & Norway*	2
19=	**Dani Olmo** *RB Leipzig/Barcelona & Spain*	2
19=	**James Rodriguez** *Sao Paulo/Rayo Vallecano & Colombia*	2
19=	**Bernardo Silva** *Manchester City & Portugal*	2
27=	**Arda Guler** *Real Madrid & Turkey*	1
27=	**Emiliano Martinez** *Aston Villa & Argentina*	1
27=	**Raphinha** *Barcelona & Brazil*	1
27=	**Bukayo Saka** *Arsenal & England*	1

MEN'S WORLD MANAGER OF THE YEAR

Rank	Name	Total
1	**Carlo Ancelotti** *Real Madrid*	184
2	**Xabi Alonso** *Bayer Leverkusen*	163
3	**Luis De la Fuente** *Spain*	147
4	**Pep Guardiola** *Manchester City*	46
5	**Gian Piero Gasperini** *Atalanta*	27
6	**Lionel Scaloni** *Argentina*	8
7	**Unai Emery** *Aston Villa*	7
8=	**Makram Daboub** *Palestine*	5
8=	**Emerse Fae** *Ivory Coast*	5
10=	**Eric Roy** *Brest*	4
10=	**Edin Terzic** *B. Dortmund*	4
10=	**Thomas Tuchel** *Bayern Munich*	4
13=	**Jorge Jesus** *Al Hilal*	3
13=	**Gareth Southgate** *England*	3
15=	**Mikel Arteta** *Arsenal*	2
15=	**Michel** *Girona*	2
17=	**Hussein Ammouta** *Jordan*	1
17=	**Santi Denia** *Spain Under-23s*	1
17=	**Jurgen Klopp** *Liverpool*	1
17=	**Kjetil Knutsen** *Bodo/Glimt*	1
17=	**Wilfried Nancy** *Columbus Crew*	1
17=	**Qurban Qurbanov** *Qarabag*	1
17=	**Arne Slot** *Feyenoord/Liverpool*	1

MEN'S WORLD TEAM OF THE YEAR

Rank	Name	Total
1	**Spain**	217
2	**Real Madrid**	176
3	**Bayer Leverkusen**	128
4	**Manchester City**	39
5	**Argentina**	16
6	**Atalanta**	11
7	**Palestine**	5
8=	**Brest**	4
8=	**Ivory Coast**	4
10=	**Colombia**	3
10=	**Sudan**	3
12=	**Aston Villa**	2
12=	**Girona**	2
14=	**Al Hilal**	1
14=	**Arsenal**	1
14=	**Bayern Munich**	1
14=	**Borussia Dortmund**	1
14=	**Botafogo**	1
14=	**Brann**	1
14=	**Fluminense**	1
14=	**Internazionale**	1
14=	**Olympiacos**	1
14=	**Qarabag**	1

WOMEN'S WORLD PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Rank	Name	Total
1	**Aitana Bonmati** *Barcelona & Spain*	114
2	**Caroline Graham Hansen** *Barcelona & Norway*	75
3	**Salma Paralluelo** *Barcelona & Spain*	44
4	**Lindsey Horan** *Lyon & USA*	22
5	**Sophia Smith** *Portland Thorns & USA*	19
6	**Mallory Swanson** *Chicago Red Stars & USA*	13
7	**Marie-Antoinette Katoto** *Paris Saint-Germain & France*	10
8	**Trinity Rodman** *Washington Spirit & USA*	9
9=	**Barbra Banda** *Shanghai RCB/Orlando Pride & Zambia*	7
9=	**Temwa Chawinga** *Kansas City Current & Malawi*	7
9=	**Lauren James** *Chelsea & England*	7
9=	**Khadija Shaw** *Manchester City &Jamaica*	7
13=	**Mariona Caldentey** *Barcelona/Arsenal & Spain*	3
13=	**Tabitha Chawinga** *PSG/Lyon & Malawi*	3
13=	**Naomi Girma** *San Diego Wave & USA*	3
13=	**Ada Hegerberg** *Lyon & Norway*	3
17=	**Kadidiatou Diani** *Lyon & France*	2
17=	**Patri Guijarro** *Barcelona & Spain*	2
17=	**Giulia Gwinn** *Bayern Munich & Germany*	2
17=	**Yui Hasegawa** *Manchester City &Japan*	2
17=	**Alexia Putellas** *Barcelona & Spain*	2
22=	**Lucy Bronze** *Barcelona/Chelsea & England*	1
22=	**Gabi Portilho** *Corinthians & Brazil*	1
22=	**Mayra Ramirez** *Levante/Chelsea & Colombia*	1
22=	**Lea Schuller** *Bayern Munich & Germany*	1

WOMEN'S WORLD MANAGER OF THE YEAR

Rank	Name	Total
1	**Emma Hayes** *Chelsea/USA*	104
2	**Jonatan Giraldez** *Barcelona/Washington Spirit*	69
3	**Sonia Bompastor** *Lyon/Chelsea*	14
4	**Arthur Elias** *Brazil*	10
5	**Seb Hines** *Orlando Pride*	7
6	**Pere Romeu** *Barcelona*	4
7=	**Mila Martinez** *Tigres UANL*	3
7=	**Filipa Patao** *Benfica*	3
9=	**Horst Hrubesch** *Germany*	1
9=	**Karl Joel Kjetselberg** *Rosengard*	1

WOMEN'S WORLD TEAM OF THE YEAR

Rank	Name	Total
1	**Barcelona**	102
2	**USA**	55
3	**Chelsea**	22
4	**Lyon**	18
5	**Spain**	8
6=	**Brazil**	3
6=	**Gotham FC**	3
6=	**Manchester City**	3
9=	**Brann**	1
9=	**Orlando Pride**	1

THE VOTING PANEL

Adam White	*France*
Adel Ferdowsipour	*Iran*
Alec McQuarrie	*England*
Alexander Bobrov	*Russia*
Anthony Tomas	*Serbia*
Asif Burhan	*England*
Balazs Gyenge	*Hungary*
Bence Bocsak	*England*
Boris Bogdanov	*Russia*
Carl Worswick	*Colombia*
Danny Lewis	*England/Canada*
Dariusz Kurowski	*Poland*
Domenic Aquilina	*Malta*
Emanuel Rosu	*Romania*
Emanuele Giulianelli	*Italy*
Emmanuel Ayamga	*Ghana*
Fabio Licari	*Italy*
Francois Colin	*Belgium*
Glenn Moore	*England*
Guillem Balague	*England/Spain*
Harry De Cosemo	*England*
Henry Flynn	*Spain*
Henry Winter	*England*
Iacopo Iandiorio	*Italy*
James Kelly	*Wales*
James Nalton	*England/United States*
Jamie Carragher	*England*
Jamie Evans	*World Soccer*
Jared Tinslay	*World Soccer*
Jim Holden	*Europe*
John Duerden	*Asia*
Josh Butler	*England/Norway*
Keir Radnedge	*England*
Klaas-Jan Droppert	*Netherlands*
Lasana Liburd	*Trinidad & Tobago*
Lukas Vrablik	*Slovakia*
Luke Entwistle	*France*
Manos Staramopoulos	*Greece*
Mark Gleeson	*South Africa*
Mark Pitman	*Wales*
Martin del Palacio Langer	*Mexico*
Matheus Celani	*Brazil*
Mike Plastow	*Japan*
Miron Goihman	*Moldova*
Neel Shelat	*Qatar*
Nick Bidwell	*England/Germany*
Oleg Zadernovsky	*Ukraine*
Oluwashina Okeleji	*Nigeria*
Paul Hassall	*England*
Peter Drury	*England*
Peterjon Cresswell	*Hungary*
Phil Gordon	*Scotland*
Rasim Movsumzadeh	*Azerbaijan*
Rumen Paytashev	*Bulgaria*
Sam Beckwith	*Czech Republic*
Sam Matterface	*England*
Samindra Kunti	*Belgium*
Sander Berends	*Netherlands*
Sasa Ibrulj	*Bosnia & Herzegovina*
Seán Creedon	*Republic of Ireland*
Simon Hill	*Australia*
Sophie Lawson	*England*
Stephen Fishlock	*World Soccer*
Steve Menary	*England*
Tom Kundert	*Portugal*
Troels Bager Thogersen	*Denmark*
Vicente Dattoli	*Brazil*
Victor Gusev	*Russia*
Vladimir Novak	*Serbia*
Zdravko Reic	*Croatia*

PLAYER

RODRI

Men's World Player of the Year

The brightest, most illuminating of midfield lights as Manchester City won yet another Premier League and Spain joyously clinched their fourth European title, Rodri's coronation as the *World Soccer* Men's World Player of the Year represents a much-needed sea-change in the way football's glittering individual prizes are doled out.

Unsurprisingly, the extravagant skills of attackers and creative midfielders have long tended to be the sole criteria when electing an MVP; in 42 years of our award, only two players who were neither a forward nor midfield playmaker – Italian defenders Paolo Maldini in 1994 and Fabio Cannavaro in 2006 – have received the ultimate accolade. In recent times, Rodri has shaken up the entire appreciation process, ripped off the blinkers and widened the perspective.

Thanks to the Madrid-born Rodri, high-level dirty work in the engine room is fashionable. Normally a player in his position exists only to service others, to provide the platform for the attacking-third magicians to grab the glory. But so accomplished at his job is the 28-year-old that he has become box office himself, rightly considered the brains of club and country.

Incredible to think that Rodri is one of a markedly restricted sample of Spanish players who have emerged victorious in various global polls. The first Spaniard to be elected *World Soccer* Men's Player of the Year since Barcelona playmaker Xavi in 2010, the Manchester City star also made history when recently winning the Ballon d'Or, only the second man born in Spain ever to scoop the prize, emulating

Key man...Rodri celebrates Spain's victory over Germany at Euro 2024

Title-sealing goal ...Rodri celebrates after scoring v West Ham

European champion...Rodri gets his hand on the Euro 2024 trophy

the 1960 feat of the late, great Barca and Spain inside-forward Luis Suarez (note: the Argentine-born Alfredo Di Stefano won the prize twice in the late 1950s whilst representing Spain at international level).

Many Spanish pundits have cried foul over the years about this lack of recognition, loudly bemoaning an exercise which overlooked the likes of Emilio Butragueno, Raul, Andres Iniesta, David Villa, Iker Casillas and Sergio Ramos. In an interview last month on an Iberian TV chat show, the ever-humble Rodri took a similar tack, referring to the Spain and Barcelona teams that took the world by storm in the opening decade-and-a-half of this century.

"In my opinion, that generation of Spanish players was the best in the history of football, protagonists in great moments of the game with our national team and in La Liga," declared Rodri, who arrived on set with the aid of crutches after suffering a season-ending cruciate ligament injury in September. "For us to only have one Ballon d'Or [before him] is a curious thing. It's not as though that golden generation was not capable of winning. Many of them were better players than me."

His parents, Antonio and Elena, brought him up to be self-effacing and hard-working – blowing his own trumpet is anathema to him – so others have to do it for him. He fully deserved to be voted Player of the Tournament at Euro 2024, despite exiting the final against England at half-time with a hamstring problem. But when on the pitch in Germany, he was nothing less than world-class, impressively pulling the strings in the middle of the park and quietly setting the emotional tone.

At the 2022 World Cup, Spain boss Luis Enrique chose the Barca veteran Sergio Busquets as his midfield anchor, confining Rodri to a central defensive role. As soon as Luis de la Fuente replaced Enrique early in January 2023, Rodri was restored to his best position in midfield, a switch that would be hugely beneficial for all concerned.

"We have Rodri, who is a perfect computer," gushed De la Fuente after Spain's 4-1 victory over Georgia in the Euro 2024 last 16, a game in which Rodri slammed home a fine equaliser late in the first half. "He administers everything, the emotions, all the moments in a magisterial way – that is a great help for everyone."

Nor does his worth to Manchester City need spelling out. Whenever he is not available, City go from powerhouse unit to Swiss cheese in short order. Ever since Rodri's ACL injury, Pep Guardiola's usually formidable side have, to a large extent, disintegrated. For all City's wealth, they simply have no one to replace Rodri's unique two-direction talents: his mastery of the art of regaining possession and his visionary distribution.

If Rodri is fit, he plays. Last season, the Spanish ace started no fewer than 50 matches for City, more than any of his team-mates, and it was no coincidence that he was suspended for the only three Premier League games which they lost.

"He is the best player in the world"

Pep Guardiola on Rodri

FACT FILE

Age *28 (22.06.96)*
Club *Manchester City (Eng)*
Country *Spain*
Previous clubs *Villarreal, Atletico Madrid*
2024 Honours *Premier League, European Championship*

The data from last term very much backs up the Superman theory. He regained possession (70 tackles, 26 interceptions) more than any other City player, while he took more touches (4,116) and played more passes (3,633) than any player in the league. The fact that he is also able to contribute so much in the attacking third – nine assists and eight goals in last season's Premier League, including the strike that sealed the title against West Ham on the final day – shows just how special a talent he is.

Guardiola is no fool. He knows how important his midfield lynchpin is to the team. "People talk about without Rodri and of course we miss him, he is the best player in the world," said the manager recently when explaining his team's loss of form. "Imagine at Barcelona when Messi was the best player. Without him, that season [2008-09], would I have won the treble? I don't win the treble."

Rodri may not go on to match Messi's haul of individual honours, but in terms of his influence on the team, he is more than worthy of comparison.

Nick Bidwell

TEAM

SPAIN

Men's World Team of the Year

With hindsight, it is easy to look back at Spain's success at Euro 2024 and see a squad built for glory. It had all the necessary elements: gritty, experienced winners like Dani Carvajal; thrilling, emerging talent like Nico Williams and Lamine Yamal; an elite world-class midfielder at the peak of his powers in Rodri; all marshalled by a coach, Luis de la Fuente, who knew the players intimately from his time leading the youth ranks.

There was genuine tournament knowhow, too. Not only had Spain reached the semi-finals of Euro 2020, only eliminated on penalties by eventual champions Italy, they were also reigning UEFA Nations League champions. At Under-21 level, they had reached three of the previous four European finals, while the Under-23s bagged silver at the Olympics in Tokyo in 2021.

Still, when Euro 2024 began, there was more reason for *La Roja* doubt than expectation. The memory of Qatar 2022, when they had been beaten by Japan in the group stage and then dumped out by Morocco on penalties in the last 16, weighed heavily. It wasn't just that the defeats were against teams they were expected to beat, it was that they followed a familiar and depressing pattern, one that echoed their humiliating World Cup defence in 2014: dominating possession but lacking cutting edge.

There were doubts, also, about De la Fuente. Promoted to replace Luis Enrique after the World Cup, this was by far the biggest job in the 63-year-old's career. He had been employed by the federation for a decade, having previously worked in the academies of Sevilla and Athletic Club, and been sacked by Alaves after just a few months in his last senior management role 13 years earlier.

Qualification had been secured comfortably enough, with seven wins out of eight, although an early defeat to Scotland meant they were playing catch-up for most of it.

Then, in March, Spain hosted Brazil at the Bernabeu. It was a chaotic friendly, with three of the six goals coming from penalties and another from a sloppy Unai Simon error. With big summer tournaments on the horizon, neither side seemed particularly satisfied after the 3-3 draw. And yet in many ways it provided an early blueprint for Spain's Euro 2024 victory. In fact, the exact same XI took to the field in Berlin to face England in the final four months later.

The 4-3-3 formation that had been used in qualifying was replaced by a 4-2-3-1. Dani Olmo, who had started just two qualifiers, both as a winger, started as the number ten. Marc Cucurella, who hadn't played a minute of qualifying, came in at left-back. For only the third time, and the first time against top-tier opposition, Williams and Yamal both started on the wings.

This was a glimpse of Spain 2.0, *tiki-taka* with a twist. They had a directness and a verticality that had been missing in Qatar.

Yamal was involved in all three of Spain's goals. The winger won the first penalty himself after a tricky dribble into the box, then set up the second, feeding Olmo as he made a driving forward run before finishing. He did the same again for the third, this time playing in right-back Carvajal who won another penalty.

A late Brazilian equaliser punctured any optimism garnered on the night, but this was the start of something special.

Handed one of the toughest draws at the finals, with Italy, Croatia and Albania, Spain advanced with a 100 per cent record. In the knockout rounds, they dispatched Georgia 4-1, overcame hosts Germany after extra-time, and then

Champions of Europe ...Spain skipper Alvaro Morata lifts the Henri Delaunay Trophy

PREVIOUS WINNERS

WORLD TEAM OF THE YEAR

1982 *Brazil*
1983 *Hamburg*
1984 *France*
1985 *Everton*
1986 *Argentina*
1987 *Porto*
1988 *Netherlands*
1989 *Milan*
1990 *West Germany*
1991 *France*
1992 *Denmark*
1993 *Parma*
1994 *Milan*
1995 *Ajax*
1996 *Nigeria*
1997 *Borussia Dortmund*
1998 *France*
1999 *Manchester United*
2000 *France*
2001 *Liverpool*
2002 *Brazil*
2003 *Milan*
2004 *Greece*
2005 *Liverpool*
2006 *Barcelona*
2007 *Iraq*
2008 *Spain*
2009 *Barcelona*
2010 *Spain*
2011 *Barcelona*
2012 *Spain*
2013 *Bayern Munich*
2014 *Germany*
2015 *Barcelona*
2016 *Leicester City*
2017 *Real Madrid*
2018 *France*
2019 *Liverpool*
2020 *Bayern Munich*
2021 *Italy*
2022 *Argentina*
2023 *Manchester City*

came from behind to beat World Cup finalists France. In the final, they rarely looked in trouble, even after Cole Palmer's 73rd-minute equaliser, calmly reasserting control of the game and sealing a 2-1 win. By beating England, they completed an impressive hat-trick, overcoming all three of the sides that had been ranked above them in the pre-tournament betting markets.

> Major tournaments are not always won by the best team, but here it was undoubtedly the case

Major tournaments are not always won by the best team, but here it was undoubtedly the case.

"I said I was proud, and today I am even prouder," said De la Fuente after the final. "It confirms what we are. For me, they are the best in the world, and today I confirm that definition."

Jamie Evans

MANAGER

CARLO ANCELOTTI

Men's World Manager of the Year

Since the first *World Soccer* awards back in 1982, only four men have been named World Manager of the Year more than once: Sir Alex Ferguson, Jose Mourinho, Pep Guardiola and now, Carlo Ancelotti. Ferguson had to wait five years between his first two awards, Mourinho's came in back-to-back years, while Pep won his first two in the space of three years. For Ancelotti, the wait has been 21 years.

His first came in 2003 after he'd won the Champions League for the first time; his second came after he'd lifted the trophy for the fifth time.

It is difficult to explain why he has been overlooked so often, but mostly it is an issue of timing. His best seasons have been overshadowed by bigger and better storylines. When he won his first *Scudetto* in 2004, Mourinho won the Champions League with Porto. When he won a second Champions League in 2007, Ferguson won the Premier League for the first time in four years. When he guided Chelsea to a record-breaking title in 2010, Mourinho won the treble with Inter. His next two Champions League wins, in 2014 and 2022, came in World Cup years, putting the spotlight on Joachim Low and Lionel Scaloni instead.

There is a sense that the Italian tends to be compared unfavourably with his contemporaries. He doesn't have Ferguson's longevity, nor his ruthlessness in pursuing league titles – in fact, he has never successfully defended a league title. He doesn't have Guardiola's tactical identity, nor his broader stylistic influence, instead regarded as a great man manager rather than a great tactician. And he doesn't have Mourinho's charisma, nor his record of winning with underdogs, with all his trophies coming at genuine super clubs while struggling at Napoli and Everton.

Yet in 2024, he largely defied those critics. He won his sixth league title, 20 years on from his first, doing so with a brilliantly-devised tactical plan that accounted for the fact that Madrid had no recognised top-level striker following the departure of Karim Benzema.

Many coaches would have complained, lacking the patience to adapt, writing off the season as a transitional one while waiting for the necessary signings to arrive. Few managers would have the tactical nous to adapt, fewer still the man-management to bring the players on board. Not Carlo. With a nonchalant raise of that iconic eyebrow, he got on with the job and was rewarded with his fifth Champions League – two more than Guardiola, and three more than Ferguson and Mourinho. This was a managerial masterclass par excellence.

Jamie Evans

Number five ...Ancelotti with the Champions League trophy

PREVIOUS WINNERS

WORLD MANAGER OF THE YEAR

1982 Enzo Bearzot, *Italy*
1983 Sepp Piontek, *Denmark*
1984 Michel Hidalgo, *France*
1985 Terry Venables, *Barcelona*
1986 Guy Thys, *Belgium*
1987 Johan Cruyff, *Ajax*
1988 Rinus Michels, *Netherlands/B. Leverkusen*
1989 Arrigo Sacchi, *Milan*
1990 Franz Beckenbauer, *West Germany/Marseille*
1991 Michel Platini, *France*
1992 Richard Moller Nielsen, *Denmark*
1993 Alex Ferguson, *Man. United*
1994 Carlos Alberto Parreira, *Brazil*
1995 Louis van Gaal, *Ajax*
1996 Berti Vogts, *Germany*
1997 Ottmar Hitzfeld, *B. Dortmund*
1998 Arsene Wenger, *Arsenal*
1999 Alex Ferguson, *Man. United*
2000 Dino Zoff, *Italy*
2001 Gerard Houllier, *Liverpool*
2002 Guus Hiddink, *South Korea/PSV*
2003 Carlo Ancelotti, *Milan*
2004 Jose Mourinho, *Porto/Chelsea*
2005 Jose Mourinho, *Chelsea*
2006 Marcello Lippi, *Italy*
2007 Alex Ferguson, *Man. United*
2008 Alex Ferguson, *Man. United*
2009 Pep Guardiola, *Barcelona*
2010 Jose Mourinho, *Internazionale/Real Madrid*
2011 Pep Guardiola, *Barcelona*
2012 Vicente del Bosque, *Spain*
2013 Jupp Heynckes, *Bayern Munich*
2014 Joachim Low, *Germany*
2015 Luis Enrique, *Barcelona*
2016 Claudio Ranieri, *Leicester City*
2017 Zinedine Zidane, *Real Madrid*
2018 Didier Deschamps, *France*
2019 Jurgen Klopp, *Liverpool*
2020 Hansi Flick, *Bayern Munich*
2021 Roberto Mancini, *Italy*
2022 Lionel Scaloni, *Argentina*
2023 Pep Guardiola, *Man. City*

PLAYER/TEAM

AITANA BONMATI & BARCELONA

Women's World Player of the Year, Women's World Team of the Year

Cajoled into conducting a touchline broadcast interview, in English, after Spain's defeat in the Olympics bronze medal match against Germany in the summer, Aitana Bonmati was not happy; a fourth-place finish on Spain's Olympic debut was not good enough.

Her team, she said, deserved their fate, they made too many mistakes, and fourth was "a bad result for us".

For anyone who has watched the Netflix documentary *Acerca de #SeAcabó* (English title: *It's All Over*) it was no surprise that Spain looked jaded, exhausted after a traumatic year of struggle with their own federation.

Which makes the continued excellence of Bonmati, who retains her *World Soccer* Women's World Player of the Year crown, and Barcelona, who replace the national side as Women's World Team of the Year, all the more impressive.

Bonmati's uncompromising verdict, on that touchline in Lyon, is part of the reason. Still only 26, and also back-to-back winner of the Ballon d'Or and UEFA Champions League Player of the Year awards, she continues to strive for perfection.

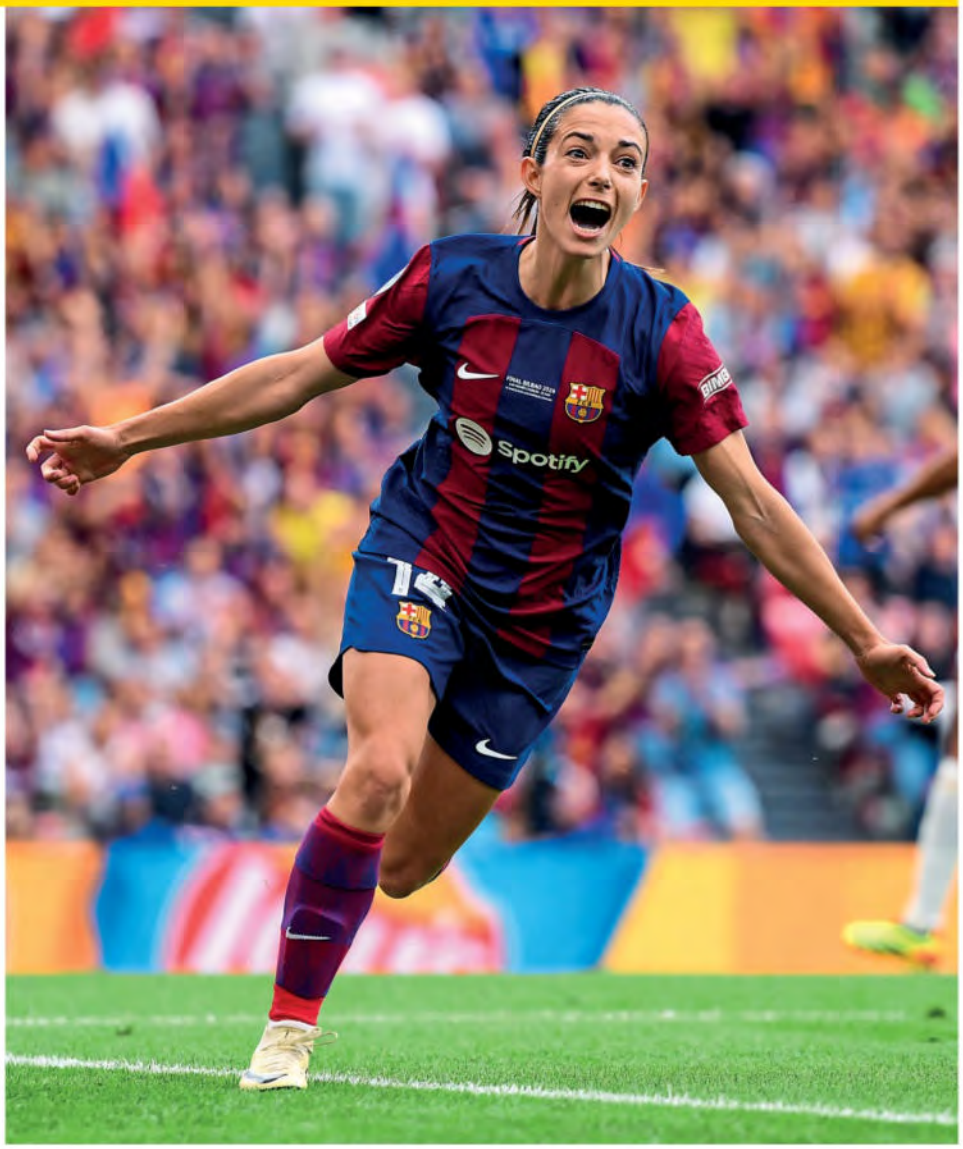
While the Olympics were a disappointment, she scored the only goal of the final as Spain won the UEFA Nations League, and six, including the key first goal in the final, as Barcelona retained their Champions League crown. This ability to hit the target when it matters is even more creditable given her main role is as a creator, not taker, of goals.

For club and country Bonmati has become the fulcrum; an intelligent and diminutive conductor of the two teams that currently dominate the women's game.

Barcelona's pre-eminence was underlined in the voting for *World Soccer* Women's World Player of the Year with eight players nominated in the poll. Caroline Graham Hansen came second and Salma Paralluelo third, while Alexia Putellas, Fridolina Rolfo and Patri Guijarro, and former players Mariona Caldentey and Lucy Bronze (now at Arsenal and Chelsea respectively), also received votes.

The Catalan club's dominant 2023-24 season was all-conquering, winning the Champions League, Spanish title, Copa de la Reina and Spanish Super Cup. In the league, they won 29 and drew one of their 30 matches. In the domestic cups, they won all seven games scoring 38 goals and conceding just once.

In total, they played 49 competitive matches, scoring an incredible 211 goals and conceding 19. They won 46, drew twice, with Levante in the league and Benfica in Europe, and lost once.



Opener...Bonmati celebrates scoring in the Champions League final against Lyon

That sole blemish was a 1-0 defeat at home to Chelsea in the Champions League semi-final first leg – a result that they overturned a week later, winning 2-0 at Stamford Bridge to reach the final. Bonmati again delivered when it mattered, scoring the goal that levelled the tie.

Going into December the only other loss in 2024 was also to an English team, a 2-0 defeat to Manchester City in the Champions League group stage. They had won every other game, at home and abroad in the 2024-25 season.

This serene progress is despite a change of manager. Jonatan Giraldez, after overseeing 130 wins in 139 games, moved to Washington Spirit in the summer, whom he subsequently steered to the NWSL final.

His departure was announced mid-season but did not upset the team's progress to a quadruple, capped by their third Champions League success, achieved via a 2-0 victory over Lyon in front of 50,827 in Bilbao.

His replacement is Pere Romeu. Like Giraldez, who succeeded Lluis Cortes, the 31-year-old has stepped up from assistant and the transition has again appeared seamless.

There have, though, been subtle changes. Two of the XI that began the Champions League final moved to the Women's Super League, with Bronze and Caldentey heading for London. The other notable exit was that of goalkeeper Sandra Panos, who went to Club America in Mexico after being displaced at club and country by Cata Coll.

In came Poland striker Ewa Pajor from Wolfsburg, England goalkeeper Ellie Roebuck from Manchester City, and highly-rated young Portuguese forward Kika Nazareth from Benfica.

While the others were signings for the future, Pajor went straight into the XI and made an instant impact. A more traditional No.9 than Barca have possessed in years, she has provided a focal point that their intricate passing has sometimes lacked. She creates space by stretching defences, offers a direct option with her hold-up play, and makes the *Blaugrana* even more of a threat close to goal, especially from crosses.

The idea that Barca needed to be even more potent may seem laughable, but teams that do not evolve are caught by rivals.

So it is with players, hence Bonmati's quest for improvement. In the struggle documented in the *#SeAcabó* film she had to take tough decisions, first withdrawing from *La Roja*, then, after winning some concessions, returning while others continued to hold out.

The Barca players were split on that decision but, as with the national team, differences have been set aside as all got on with the business of winning.

Glenn Moore

Olympian...Bonmati celebrates scoring at Paris 2024

Barcelona's pre-eminence was underlined in the voting for *World Soccer* Women's World Player of the Year with eight players nominated in the poll

PREVIOUS WINNERS

Women's World Player of the Year

2020 Pernille Harder, *Wolfsburg/Chelsea & Denmark*
2021 Alexia Putellas, *Barcelona & Spain*
2022 Beth Mead, *Arsenal & England*
2023 Aitana Bonmati, *Barcelona & Spain*

Women's World Manager of the Year

2020 Jean-Luc Vasseur, *Lyon*
2021 Lluis Cortes, *Barcelona*
2022 Sarina Wiegman, *England*
2023 Sarina Wiegman, *England*

Women's World Team of the Year

2020 Lyon
2021 Barcelona
2022 England
2023 Spain

European champions ...Barcelona captain Alexia Putellas lifts the Champions League trophy

MANAGER

EMMA HAYES

Women's World Manager of the Year

On the evening of Wednesday, May 1, it appeared that Emma Hayes' magic touch had finally deserted her. In the space of 32 days, the departing Chelsea head coach had seen her team lose the League Cup final, fail in their defence of the FA Cup and then surrender a first-leg lead against Barcelona by losing 2-0 at home to crash out of the Champions League.

To cap it all, her team had just lost 4-3 to Liverpool with the winning goal struck in the dying moments by Gemma Bonner – a player that Hayes had sold in her first season at Chelsea in 2012. "I don't think the title will be heading to us this year," said Hayes, effectively conceding the championship that night.

Hayes had already agreed to leave Chelsea at the end of her 12th season at the club and take charge of the United States women's national team. The multiple world and Olympic champions had lost both of their global titles and slumped to their lowest-ever world ranking.

The hiring of Hayes – a serial winner at club level – seemed like a desperate attempt by US Soccer to rage against the dying of their light as a world power as European nations gradually eroded away their long-established dominance of the women's game.

Fond farewell... Hayes said goodbye to Chelsea in May

Yet by the end of the summer, Hayes' managerial alchemy had achieved the seemingly impossible. First, Chelsea won their last three league games of the season, scoring 15 goals in the process, to wrest the Women's Super League crown from Manchester City's grasp on goal difference and seal a fifth successive title – the 16th trophy of Hayes' Chelsea career.

Then, in her first test as US manager, she led them to a record fourth Olympic Gold, winning six matches out of six at Paris 2024. Victory even ensured the United States regained their number one world ranking.

Those successes were made all the more remarkable by the fact that Hayes had lost her talismanic forward Sam Kerr in January to a season-ending anterior cruciate ligament injury. A month later, the Matildas striker's stand-in, Mia Fishel, succumbed to the same injury.

As United States coach, she inherited an ageing team in need of an overhaul. Identifying an experience gap between the established veterans and the

2024 Olympic champions...Hayes' gold medal-winning players celebrate

generation beneath them, she invested in the younger players, ensuring they were given their chance by interim coach Twila Kilgore.

Upon arrival, Hayes made a decisive choice by not including the legendary striker Alex Morgan in her Olympic squad, insisting that she "wanted to go in another direction". A bold decision, and one rendered even bolder when Catarina Macario, the striker she had planned to build the team around instead, succumbed to a knee injury.

"If you know the way I develop teams, I will always have a solution," said Hayes. "The challenge of making that work is one I enjoy." At the Olympics, she put her faith in the youthful trident of forwards – Trinity Rodman, Sophia Smith and Mallory Swanson – who ultimately scored all but two of the United States' goals at the tournament, including the winners in each of the three knockout games.

She also demonstrated her player management skills by successfully reintegrating Korbin Albert into the squad. The midfielder's international future had appeared to be in doubt after being criticised for her social media activity, but the 21-year-old scored the winner against Australia in the group stage and assisted the only goal in the final.

Hayes continues to cultivate success in spite of the increasing media spotlight on the women's game because she enjoys what she does – working with and improving female players. "It's my passion, it's something I've loved from the very first minute I came out of my mum's tummy."

After a two-year sabbatical from the game in 2012, her passion for coaching was reignited by watching the United States team win their previous Olympic Gold at Wembley Stadium during the London Games with her late father. Her dad had been present at the 1999 Women's World Cup final and phoned a young Hayes from the ground urging her to work in the United States.

Manager of the Year ...Hayes during the Olympic Games

Upon her arrival, she described her appointment as "such an honour," adding: "I've dreamed of this moment since I was a little girl. To be leading the United States team is something I don't think I can put into words".

Now happily settled and living close to the US Soccer HQ in Chicago, Hayes has time to bed in her squad over the next couple of years and prepare them for an attempt to match the Brazil men's team by winning a World Cup on a fourth different continent in 2027.

Asif Burhan

> "I've dreamed of this moment...to be leading the United States team is something I don't think I can put into words"
>
> Emma Hayes

PLAYER

WILLIAM TROOST-EKONG

The Nigeria captain was the AFCON Player of the Tournament

William Troost-Ekong's strong mentality has been shaped by doubt and scepticism. His father wanted him to take a more conventional path and certain coaches questioned his ability, but that only added fuel to the fire. When others might have given up, or lowered their ambitions, he kept going.

This refusal to admit defeat, combined with a willingness to explore, has led to a nomadic and eventful career that reached unexpected new heights in 2024. Professional football has taken the centre-back on a whirlwind tour of Europe, to top division clubs in seven different countries, and the cusp of greatness with Nigeria in the latest Africa Cup of Nations.

Released by Tottenham Hotspur at 19 and exiled by the national team in 2023, Troost-Ekong has persevered through many setbacks. While football is more sophisticated and methodical than ever before, with data analysis at the forefront of its development, certain intangible qualities – resilience, determination, self-belief – will always have their place.

Troost-Ekong's success in captaining the Super Eagles to February's AFCON final – scoring three goals and being named the best player of a compelling tournament – was testament to these characteristics. When others doubted, he didn't. That's often been the case and part of him likes it that way. There's an added satisfaction in upsetting the odds.

"I seem to have this pattern where, whenever I have a setback, I get a bigger drive to try and prove to other people that I can do it. Now it's more to prove it to myself," says Troost-Ekong. "I think desire is probably my strongest point as an athlete. I'm willing to do more than anyone else. I never felt like I was the most talented, so I wanted to make sure that I outworked everyone."

Incredibly, Nigeria's lynchpin, who inspired them to the brink of glory, was nearly left out of their AFCON squad altogether. Troost-Ekong had been a regular since making his debut in 2015 but a disagreement with former manager Jose Peseiro saw him miss out on selection for the games building up to the finals in the Ivory Coast. He was hurt by the snub and briefly thought there might be no way back.

"I even considered retiring from international football because I was quite upset about how I felt I was treated," he admits. "It was a fight for my ego. I had to humble myself. I messaged the manager explaining that I was slightly frustrated, but, of course, I was more than willing to be part of the tournament one way or another. We made up in December, just before the list came out."

Although Troost-Ekong was included, Peseiro explained that he was primarily selected for his vast experience and shouldn't expect to play. Unwilling to be sidelined again, his pride kicked in. The 31-year-old performed well enough in a pre-tournament friendly with Guinea to change the manager's mind, earning his spot alongside Calvin Bassey and Semi Ajayi in a revamped back three. With Ahmed Musa confined to the bench, he was awarded the captaincy too. It was a remarkable turnaround.

"There was never any feeling of bitterness or trying to rub it in anyone's face. I tried to just enjoy the experience for what it was. Maybe having accepted that it could be my last tournament for Nigeria made it even more enjoyable. By being relaxed, I was really able to be present in the moment and help the team the way I did. I never felt any pressure, regardless of how much there was from Nigerians in general outside our camp."

He seized the moment and never looked back. Troost-Ekong's penalty, struck emphatically down the middle, defeated hosts Ivory Coast in the Super Eagles' second group game and he was a rock in the knockout rounds as Nigeria battled their way through to the final. The centre-back scored again from the spot in normal time, and yet again in the shootout, to overcome South Africa.

AFCON Player of the Tournament...CAF president Patrice Motsepe presents Troost-Ekong with the award

> "It's left me hungry to hopefully give it another go in 2025 and try to go one better"
>
> Wiiliam Troost-Ekong

NIGERIA FOOTBALL FEDERATION
1945

Final heartbreak... Troost-Ekong after collecting his silver medal in Abidjan

On February 11, the Alassane Ouattara Stadium was packed. A continent watched on. With the trophy, and a place in AFCON history at stake, Nigeria faced a rejuvenated Ivory Coast. Emerse Fae had taken charge of *Les Elephants* during the group stage and overseen a miraculous recovery; the hosts had twice survived when elimination looked almost certain, turning a disastrous start to the tournament on its head.

Towards the end of the first half, Nigeria went in front. A corner by Ademola Lookman – whose three knockout-round goals had dispatched Cameroon and Angola – was flicked on at the near post. As the ball hung in the air ten yards out, Troost-Ekong attacked it with purpose, his powerful header finding the top corner. Yet despite trailing, the hosts continued to dominate the final.

Reunited...Nigeria coach Jose Peseiro speaks with his captain on the touchline

"This time around you could feel that the atmosphere was different in the stadium. They had a real sense of belief," explains Troost-Ekong. "At half-time, I said to the players: 'We have to be very wary, because now they really have nothing to lose. They've shown that they like being an underdog.' When they felt that they had the momentum, they went for the kill. The manager really got them going again. It was a different team."

Success was snatched away late on as Ivory Coast came from behind to win. Sebastien Haller's instinctive finish sealed a momentous comeback for both player and team. The Borussia Dortmund striker had only recovered from testicular cancer a year earlier.

In the wake of such a dramatic loss, Troost-Ekong was overwhelmed by a swirl of emotions. "It was quite a lot to digest. After the final whistle, it was too much. I tried to keep my tears away, but it wasn't always possible. I felt very proud for us to be there

as a team, but I also felt disappointed because we didn't perform as well as we could have done," he says.

"A bit further down the line, when I saw Sebastien Haller on the pitch with his wife and kids, after everything he'd been through, it put it all back into perspective. I just felt very fortunate and happy to be part of that experience. For some reason, it felt like that was bigger than us."

> "After the final whistle, it was too much. I tried to keep my tears away, but it wasn't always possible"
> Wiiliam Troost-Ekong

Troost-Ekong fell just short of claiming the ultimate prize, but his redemption was complete. The journeyman defender had suddenly become an international star: the defining figure of a tournament showcasing the best of African football. Amidst all the acclaim, the gratitude of his fellow countrymen was the greatest honour and a source of motivation.

"It's amazing. AFCON itself was a special experience. I've been to three, but this was by far the best tournament as a whole. To be so close, you want to win it. Most of all, we made Nigerians proud. It's left me hungry to hopefully give it another go in 2025 and try to go one better," says Troost-Ekong, who has 76 caps to his name.

The prospect of even competing on such a grand stage seemed so remote when he failed to make the grade at Tottenham. That early rejection prompted some soul-searching and Troost-Ekong used it to his advantage, rebuilding away from the spotlight. He has always welcomed a challenge.

"You're in a bubble at a top academy. It feels a bit surreal because you have the same facilities as Premier League players. You're driving into the same car park and eating lunch with them, but you're so far off what they're achieving. Then to reset yourself, go further down the footballing pyramid to try to find somewhere you can get first-team experience is really difficult. You have to prove yourself all over again."

Others would have been deterred by the route he had to take. Troost-Ekong went back to the Netherlands, where he was born, to join Groningen in 2013. The next five years took him all around Europe, to Belgium (Gent), Norway (Haugesund), Turkey (Bursaspor) and Italy (Udinese). Each step was necessary for his development. A couple of seasons in Serie A finally paved the way back to England.

"I loved the level. I loved the challenge. It improved me a lot as a defender," he says of his spell in Italy. "But playing in the Premier League was always my dream and so to achieve that with Watford was special. It meant a lot. It felt like a real reward for believing in myself, for going through all those steps and all those countries. The whole journey. It validated the work I was doing."

Relegation with Watford, and the sense that he hadn't given the best account of himself, still hurts Troost-Ekong, but the football world moves on quickly. Another country was added to an already eclectic list when he joined Greek side PAOK in 2023. They won just their fourth title – the first trophy of the defender's career – and reached the quarter-finals of the Europa Conference League.

"The chance to play European football was massive for me because I'd never done that before. It's different to be part of a team that's trying to win prizes. I was very excited about the project and the experience was good. My family really enjoyed life in Thessaloniki. There's lovely weather and great food so it ticked a lot of boxes."

A hamstring injury, picked up shortly after returning from AFCON, ended Troost-Ekong's season. Those high-profile performances, though, had drastically elevated his reputation and generated interest from a variety of clubs, culminating in a move to Al Kholood of the Saudi Pro League, and the eighth different country of his career, in the summer. Nothing should ever be ruled out for a player who's made a virtue of his willingness to take risks.

Sean Cole

Released...Troost-Ekong began his career at Premier League giants Tottenham

PLAYER

ANDRES INIESTA

Spain and Barcelona legend hangs up his boots

The way that Andres Iniesta always told it, in that last fraction of a second just before the greatest explosion of joy in Spanish football history, there was silence. Standing there at Soccer City, Johannesburg, watching the ball sit up before him in the 116th minute of the World Cup final, he could *hear* it. He knew. All he had to do, he said on the plane home from South Africa, trophy on board, was wait. Gravity would put the ball on his foot, and he would put it into the net and them into paradise.

It had to be him who scored the goal that made Spain world champions for the first time, defeating the Dutch late on a Sunday night in July 2010. There was no one they would have liked it to be more. If it was going to be anyone's moment, let it be the man who was everyone's, the footballer they all embraced.

Before the game, Iniesta had asked Hugo, the kitman, to help him. As he headed out to warm up, Hugo took a marker pen and wrote a note on Iniesta's undershirt, then laid it on the bench ready for the midfielder to wear, an unremarkable white vest that now said: "Dani Jarque, always with us" on the front. Jarque, the captain of Espanyol had passed away at 26 after suffering a heart attack. His wife Jessica watched the match on TV, her first in a year since his death. "I knew it was coming. I started to cry before you scored," she later told Iniesta.

An entire country did. Commentating on the game for Spanish TV, ex-Spain coach Jose Antonio Camacho shouted: "*Iniesta de mi vida*!" – Iniesta of my life! His and everyone's. In some cases that was literal: when Iniesta scored the late goal at Stamford Bridge that sent Barca through against Chelsea in 2009, it genuinely caused a spike in the birth rate in Catalonia. Even that, though, didn't compare to what happened in 2010. Never mind just sport, there may be no moment at all that has meant as much to as many people here and, when Iniesta announced his retirement in October, that was again made clear.

World Cup hero ...Iniesta after scoring against the Netherlands

It wasn't even about the moments, those peaks, however high they were. Instead it was about something more steadfast, the comfort and the warmth in watching him. He had already left Spain to play in Japan and then the United Arab Emirates, everyone getting used to the idea of his absence, but now it was like part of all of them had gone.

"Sometimes I get the feeling Andres doesn't realise how important he is: one day he'll retire and we'll see the magnitude of what he has done," Xavi once said. That Tuesday, at a press conference down by the Port in Barcelona, perhaps he, and they, did. "What I most feel is the affection," Iniesta said. "The pride is because I made lots of people happy."

His retirement was a shared event, a passing; it belonged to them all. Because of the player and the man. "He's an amazingly good person; someone kicks him and he's the one who says sorry," Samuel Eto'o once said, although Sergio Ramos disagreed: "You can't kick him; it's Andres," he claimed.

But he did get kicked, did get hit, and often. Iniesta is 40 and he admits that his body aches every morning. It was finally time to let go. A player of smooth elegance who made it look easy had not had it easy. Born in Fuentealbilla, a village of 2,071 people, he had first been seen in competition in Brunete, northwest of Madrid. He had cried all the way to Barcelona when he joined them. His success there was "forged through silent tears," in the words of the goalkeeper Victor Valdes. He would later admit to suffering something like depression.

He played the 2009 Champions League final injured, pretty much left with a hole in his thigh, and under orders not to shoot. He wasn't fit when he arrived in South Africa for the World Cup either, running around hotel corridors in the middle of the night, unseen by team-mates, trying to prove his fitness to himself. It says a lot that Vicente del Bosque waited for him, as long as it took; that when he got that injury 17 days before the 2009 final, Pep Guardiola insisted: "He plays."

No one played quite like him. There's a nice moment in the documentary *Take the Ball Pass the Ball* where the tactics of the team – maybe the best club side there has ever been – are revealed to be in essence: get the ball to Andres. Lionel Messi once explained that his plan when things went bad was to ask Andres to come closer. "When he gets the ball, it's like everything else stops, like the camera is going in slow motion," Fernando Torres said during Euro 2012. "I have been playing with him since we were 15 and I have never, ever seen him play badly." He was named player of the match in the final of the Champions League, the Euros and the World Cup.

"This was a story that starts on the playground in Fuentealbilla," he said as he bade farewell. There, he said he played the same way as he always would. The goal he scored for Barcelona to win the Nike Cup, a kind of Under-15 club world cup, in 1999 was almost the same as the one he got at Stamford Bridge. The man who handed over the trophy was Guardiola, who had signed a picture that Andres had on his wall. It was dedicated to "the best player I've ever seen."

When Iniesta joined the Barcelona first team, Pep famously pulled Xavi aside and said: "This lad is going to retire us all". And so eventually it was, an entire country walking away with him, grateful for all he had given them and there to hold onto him one last time.

Sid Lowe

> "What I most feel is the affection. The pride is because I made lots of people happy"
>
> Andres Iniesta

MANAGER

MAKRAM DABOUB

Coach who helped Palestine thrive despite misery and suffering back home

Asian Cup...Daboub and his staff before Palestine's clash against Qatar

Football coaches all have their own challenges but few have faced the situation that Makram Daboub did in 2024, and it is a testament to the Tunisian and those around him that the year was the most successful in the history of Palestine's national team. This has come at a time when the news from home has never been so grim.

The year started with the Asian Cup in Qatar but the squad's thoughts were elsewhere. Even at that time, three months into Israeli attacks on Gaza, over 20,000 people were reported to have been killed. Not only had there been no football in the territory or the neighbouring West Bank since the Hamas attack on Israel in October, players struggled to get out to report for training camps – a long-standing problem – and stadiums were destroyed or being used for other purposes.

"Keeping focused, honestly, is difficult because most of the time the players are focusing on news after training or before it, even on the bus," Daboub said as he prepared for the opening game against Iran in what was Palestine's third appearance on the continental stage. "There is a message that we need to deliver to the whole world...we are the ambassadors for Palestinian soccer, for Palestine."

Daboub did just that, answering questions about football and everything else from local, regional and international media and did so with patience, understanding and tact.

In the Asian Cup's opening game, Iran showed little sympathy for the plight of Palestine, winning 4-1. But the losing team that had never won a game in two previous tournament experiences ended up getting to the last 16. The first victory was 3-0 against Hong Kong that followed an impressive 1-1 draw with the United Arab Emirates. It earned a clash with defending champions and hosts Qatar, and when star striker Oday Dabbagh opened the scoring after 37 minutes, millions of Palestinians around the world had something to dream about. But Qatar had other ideas, eventually running out 2-1 winners before going on to win the whole thing.

"The players have honoured Palestinian football," said Daboub, a former goalkeeper, as his team left Qatar. "I am proud of my champions and they are always proud to represent the Palestinian people and alleviate their pain. The players gave everything they had despite the difficult circumstances. I can't ask more of them."

They were soon back in action as Asia's qualification for the 2026 World Cup resumed in March. At that time, Palestine had just one point from the first two games in the second round of qualification in Group I. With the top two going to the third stage and Australia expected to take top, it was a three-way tussle with Lebanon and Bangladesh. A 5-0 win over the South Asians set the tone, followed by a 1-0 win in the return in Dhaka, and Palestine took second to move into the third round of qualification for the first time, along with 17 others of Asia's finest.

It started in September at the Seoul World Cup Stadium, one of Asia's iconic venues. Palestine played their hearts out against Son Heung-min and Co. and came away with a 0-0 draw. Had Wessam Abou Ali not shot straight at Jo Hyeon-woo in the dying seconds then it would have been surely the greatest result anywhere in 2024. There followed narrow defeats against Jordan and Iraq, a 2-2 draw with Kuwait and a 1-0 loss to Oman, a game in which Palestine did not get what they deserved. Then came a 1-1 draw with Korea in Amman, Jordan, the latest in a series of temporary homes.

Tottenham superstar Son Heung-min summed it up after that clash. "I'd like to applaud them," he said. "I think they were really well prepared despite being in such a difficult situation and they executed their plans really well. I think that's something we can learn."

In short, Palestine showed in 2024 that they are consistently competitive at the top levels of Asian football and given all that has been going on at home, Makram Daboub deserves tremendous credit for that.

Had the Tunisian been Asian, then nobody could have complained if he had ousted Japan Under-23 boss Go Oiwa as the AFC Coach of the Year in Seoul in November, the scene of perhaps his best result in the best-ever year for Palestinian football, one that came against a backdrop of almost unimaginable suffering and misery.

John Duerden

> "I am proud of my champions and they are always proud to represent the Palestinian people and alleviate their pain"
>
> **Makram Daboub**

Hayya Asia
هيّا آسيا
ASIAN CUP QATAR 2023
TEAMS

PLAYER

VINICIUS JUNIOR

Champions League winner was a shining star on and off the pitch

At the start of the 2023-24 campaign, the question most people were posing about Real Madrid was how would they cope without Karim Benzema? In the event, it was not a problem. The acquisition of Jude Bellingham helped get them off to a flying start in La Liga, but the hero of their Champions League triumph was, once again, Vinicius Junior.

It seemed like insanity when, back in 2018, Real agreed to pay Flamengo £40 million for a 16-year-old Brazilian winger without a single senior competitive game to his name. But with the benefit of hindsight, the deal looks like a bargain. It is a move that changed the market, adding extra impetus to a trend where the big European clubs were buying on promise rather than reality. But not every teenager is going to turn out as successful as Vini Junior, the consistent, exhilarating king of the Champions League.

With Benzema gone, Vinicius had to alter his game. Now he would cut in, attacking the vacant space that used to be filled by the centre-forward, an idea that needed plenty of work from coach Carlo Ancelotti. "I didn't want to," says Vini, "but he convinced me to change position. He taught me to play inside. In one year, I developed more than in all of the previous seasons." And the end result was the goal that sealed another Champions League, the clever left-footed chip that put Real 2-0 up against Borussia Dortmund.

It was certainly a moment that got Rio Ferdinand excited. Working on a TV broadcast of the match, the former England centre-back was on his feet yelling: "Ballon d'Or!" over and over.

And yet the award did not come. Vini was beaten into second place by Rodri of Manchester City and Spain – just as he was in the *World Soccer* awards. There is a logical and coherent response to this: so what? Individual awards have obvious limitations in such a fluid, collective sport. Moreover, players spend the entire year stressing that they place little importance on the opinions of journalists. Why, then, get so worked up about the whole thing?

It is undeniable, though, that many of them do care about the Ballon d'Or – and that the award is taken especially seriously in Brazil. It seemed like a birthright when it was claimed by Romario, Ronaldo, Rivaldo, Ronaldinho and Kaka. But since then (2007), nothing. Winning this prize has always been one of the measures by which Neymar has been weighed and found wanting. Vini appears to feel the same way. He was bitterly disappointed. And in an attempt to state his case immediately after being spurned for the prize, he stepped up to shoulder the responsibility of a crucial penalty in Brazil's first World Cup qualifier following the Ballon d'Or controversy.

It was away to Venezuela in Maturin. Raphinha had scored two from the spot in the previous round against Peru, and had been on target with a stunning free-kick in this match. At 1-1, he should have been the taker. But Vini took responsibility, missed and the game was drawn.

Vini's motivation for stepping up was surely a desire to show that he can be the leader of the pack for his country – something that has conspicuously not happened over the past year. With the injury to Neymar, the baton passed to Vini as Brazil's senior attacking figure; throughout World Cup qualification and the Copa America, both results and performances have been disappointing.

Testing year... Vinicius breaks down in tears ahead of a friendly between Spain and Brazil

The irony here is that the type of player that Vini is most missing in the national team is someone like Rodri – a midfielder able to control the tempo of the game, move the opposition around and then slip in a killer ball. Indeed, the loss of Toni Kroos is presenting a similar problem at Real Madrid. Without such a figure to serve as a supply line, a winger is always easier to mark. He works in reduced space, with opposing defenders lining up to block him.

Uninspirational form for the national team is perhaps one reason the Ballon d'Or slipped away. Arguably, though, it is for his exploits off the pitch that Vini should be most celebrated in 2024, namely in his attempts to combat racism.

This, of course, is a serious subject. Vini did not need to move to Spain to experience racism; slavery in Brazil was abolished as recently as 1888, and the descendants of the enslaved are still among the country's disadvantaged. Vini set up an educational institute in his home neighbourhood to examine such matters.

But with his head held high and his combative nature, he has brought some of the racism of Spanish society to the surface. At considerable cost to his own mental well-being, he has obliged his adopted country to have a debate that many would prefer not to have. And this makes him a hugely significant figure, as well as a magnificently talented footballer – with or without individual awards.

Tim Vickery

> "In one year, I developed more than in all of the previous seasons"
> Vinicius Junior

London 24 FINAL
FLY BETTER
EUROPEENS

ROUND-UP
PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Akram AFIF

There is something about the AFC Asian Cup that makes Afif come to life. In a repeat of 2019, the winger was named Asia's Footballer of the Year after firing Qatar to the continental crown.

Xabi ALONSO

The achievements of Alonso and Bayer Leverkusen in 2024 still feel incomprehensible: an epic 51-match unbeaten run, an unprecedented invincible Bundesliga title, and a German Cup for good measure.

Hussein AMMOUTA

In just a year in charge, Ammouta utterly transformed Jordan's fortunes, leading them to the Asian Cup final for the first time and then making a World Cup debut a real possibility. In July he joined Al Jazira in the UAE.

Emerse FAE

It is one thing to lead your country to a continental title on home soil, but to do so after only being given the job during the group stage with the team on the brink of an early exit was truly remarkable.

Gian Piero GASPERINI

The only manager to get the better of Alonso in 2023-24, his Atalanta side's victory in the Europa League final was the culmination of one of the most impressive and exciting projects in European football.

Caroline GRAHAM HANSEN

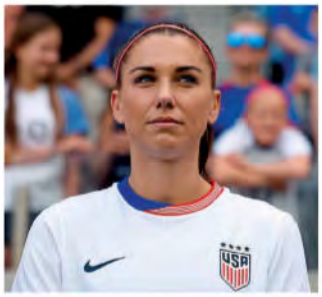
Arguably as important to Barcelona Femeni's dominance as Bonmati, Graham Hansen topped the Liga F goal charts in 2023-24 with 21 in 25 games and ended the season with a career best 32 in all comps.

Sebastien HALLER

It is hard to think of a more fairy-tale story from the past 12 months than Haller's. Just a year after returning to football following a testicular cancer diagnosis, he scored Ivory Coast's winner in the AFCON final.

Lautaro MARTINEZ

Less than two years after being dropped on Argentina's run to the World Cup trophy, Martinez made amends at the Copa America. He scored the only goal of the final to win the trophy and the Golden Boot.



Alex MORGAN

The career of one of the United States' greatest players of all time came to an end in September. Her only regret was not signing off with a gold medal, having been left out of Emma Hayes' Olympic squad.

Soufiane RAHIMI

The Moroccan had the Midas touch in 2024. First, he fired Al Ain to the AFC Champions League crown with 13 goals in as many games, then top scored at the Paris Olympics as Morocco won the bronze medal.

Eric ROY

Of all the coaches to overachieve in 2023-24 (Alonso, Thiago Motta and Michel), Roy has continued to impress the most. His Brest side have been the story of the current UEFA Champions League campaign.

Lamine YAMAL

When the full story of Yamal's career is told many years from now, 2024 will be the opening chapter. Aged 16 and already a key player for Barcelona and Spain, Euro 2024 will be one of many big trophies for him.

FAREWELL TO...

George Baldock
The English-born Greek international spent the majority of his career at MK Dons and Sheffield United.

Sol Bamba
A cult hero for multiple clubs, the Ivorian defender notably helped Cardiff City gain Premier League promotion in 2018-19.

Franz Beckenbauer
Germany's greatest-ever player, *Der Kaiser* is one of only nine players to have won the World Cup, Euros and Ballon d'Or.

Stan Bowles
A Queens Park Rangers icon as the club's sixth-highest goalscorer of all time and one of the game's true entertainers.

Andreas Brehme
A versatile German left-back, notable for scoring World Cup penalties with both feet – versus Argentina in the final of Italia '90 with his right, and against the hosts at Mexico '86 with his left.

Kevin Campbell
Adored by the Goodison Park faithful for steering Everton to Premier League safety in 1999, "Super Kev" also scored goals for Arsenal and Nottingham Forest.

Farewell tour ...Sven-Goran Eriksson revisits his old club Lazio

Sven-Goran Eriksson
The manager of England's "Golden Generation" who also won 18 trophies in a glittering club career, headlined by a UEFA Cup with IFK Goteburg, three Portuguese league titles with Benfica and a *Scudetto* with Lazio.

Roberto Fleitas
The first-ever coach to become a South American champion at both international and club level, winning the Copa America with his native Uruguay in 1987 and the Libertadores with Nacional a year later.

Der Kaiser...Franz Beckenbauer with the 1974 World Cup

Kurt Hamrin
One of the stars of Sweden's run to the World Cup final on home soil in 1958, Hamrin went on to score a record 208 goals for Fiorentina, winning the Coppa Italia twice and a UEFA Cup Winners' Cup.

Leighton James
An icon of both Swansea City and Wales, winger James scored his country's winner in their first and only victory against England at Wembley back in 1977.

Artur Jorge
Instantly recognisable with his walrus moustache, Jorge was Porto's coach when they won their first European Cup in 1987.

Joe Kinnear
Kinnear won the FA Cup, UEFA Cup and two League Cups with Tottenham, but he is best remembered for his time as manager of Wimbledon's "Crazy Gang".

Cesar Luis Menotti
An icon of Argentine football, "El Flaco" guided *La Albiceleste* to World Cup glory in 1978, their first-ever finals triumph.

Johan Neeskens
One of the great exponents of Total Football, Neeskens was arguably as key to the success of Ajax and Netherlands as Johan Cruyff, winning three European Cups and reaching two World Cup finals.

Luigi Riva
Italy's record scorer, winning the 1968 Euros and reaching the 1970 World Cup final with the *Azzurri*. Loyalty personified, He turned down offers from bigger clubs to remain in Sardinia with Cagliari, where he won the Serie A title in 1969-70.

Matija Sarkic
The Montenegro and Millwall goalkeeper tragically passed away at the age of 26.

Salvatore Schillaci
The ultimate example of a World Cup shooting star with his wild-eyed, wide-armed goal celebration, "Toto" scored six times at Italia '90 in a whirlwind international career for the *Azzurri*.

Karl-Heinz Schnellinger
Ex-German Footballer of the Year who went to four World Cups, was named in the 1962 Team of the Tournament, and helped Cologne win their first-ever league title that same year.

Craig Shakespeare
Assistant to Claudio Ranieri as Leicester City shocked the world by winning the Premier League title in 2015-16.

Gary Shaw
The Aston Villa legend was a key part of their 1981-82 European Cup-winning side and 1980-81 First Division title win.

Ron Yeats
One of the defining figures in Liverpool's history, being appointed captain as soon as he was signed by Bill Shankly in 1961 and leading the club into the top flight.

Mario Zagallo
Arguably the most significant figure in the history of Brazilian football, winning the World Cup four times – twice as a player (1958 and 1962), once as manager (1970) and again as assistant (1994).

Compiled by Ewan Grady

Brazilian icon... Mario Zagallo

2024 SUMMER LEAGUES REVIEW

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

DUFF GUIDES SHELBOURNE TO TITLE

Like so many of football's rags to riches stories, the rise of Shelbourne to their first League of Ireland title since 2006 owes much to their manager.

Former Republic of Ireland winger Damien Duff, who was appointed back in November 2021, said helping Shelbourne win the LOI Premier Division surpassed the two Premier League titles he won with Chelsea or his 100 international caps.

"It has been the greatest three years of my life," said the 45-year-old. "I spent 20 years as a footballer, but I have enjoyed these past three years more. It's tiring, but also gratifying. Football was easy for me, what I had been doing since I was a child. Managing is the hardest thing I have done in my whole life and I guess that's why it's so pleasing, so enjoyable."

Duff won the last of his 100 Irish caps at Euro 2012. Two years later, his Premier League career came to an end too, leaving Fulham to spend a year in the A-League with Melbourne City. His playing career ended in his native Dublin with Shamrock Rovers, before he took charge of the club's Under-15s.

In 2019, Duff moved to Scotland where he was first-team coach for Celtic while Neil Lennon was manager at Parkhead. Later he worked briefly as a coach as part of Republic of Ireland boss Stephen Kenny's backroom team, combining that role with managing Shelbourne's Under-17s.

Shelbourne, like Shamrock Rovers, were founded in the Ringsend area of Dublin. They were one of the eight founding members of the League of Ireland in 1921, and prior to this season they had won the league championship 13 times, but in recent campaigns they had also suffered a few relegations. Attendances were poor, and their home ground Tolka Park had seen better days.

In Duff's first season in charge, Shels finished seventh of the ten clubs, but did reach the FAI Cup final where they lost 4-0 to Derry City. The 2023 season saw an improvement with a fourth-place finish.

Irish champion... manager Damien Duff celebrates with his players

A deal with Hull City, which saw players loaned from the English Championship club to Shelbourne, certainly helped. Will Jarvis was excellent before being recalled in the summer, but Harry Wood stayed for the full season and it was he who scored the winner against Derry at the Brandywell in the final game, securing the title and ending Shamrock Rovers' winning streak.

Rovers manager Stephen Bradley admitted that his team dropped too many points early in the season in their bid to win their fifth consecutive championship. They briefly went top for the first time when they took the lead at home to Waterford in the final game but, in the end, Wood's goal won it for the Reds.

There were also heroics at the other end of the table, as Drogheda United won two finals in one week.

Manager Kevin Doherty packed in his job as a postman in the close season to go full-time with Drogheda. His team of part-timers spent the year alternating with Dundalk propping up the table, but used a run in the FAI Cup to turn their form around. After knocking Dundalk out in the second round in July, they only lost three league games to pull clear of tenth place and secure a spot in the promotion-relegation play-offs and go all the way to the cup final.

There, they stunned Derry City 2-0 to lift the trophy for only the second time in their history.

It was tough on Derry, who had gone toe-to-toe with Shelbourne for most of the season and yet finished fourth – four points behind third-placed St Patrick's Athletic – to miss out on European football altogether.

Drogheda, still buzzing from that result, saw off second-tier Bray Wanderers 3-1 a week later to secure their top-flight status and cap a memorable season.

Kevin Doherty...the Drogheda boss guided his side to cup glory and league safety

Seán Creedon

ANOTHER NORWEGIAN ROLLER-COASTER

Winter comes once again to Norway's fjord-riddled shores to signal the conclusion of another dramatic Eliteserien season. For only the second time in the last decade, the title race was decided on the final day of a thrilling campaign, as Kjetil Knutsen's impressive Bodo/Glimt side sealed their fourth title in five years.

In contrast to previous seasons where Bodo have tended to wrap up the title with games to spare, they were pushed all the way by SK Brann, who ended up with the silver medal for the second consecutive season since their promotion. Impressive, certainly, but this will feel like an opportunity missed.

A seven-game winning streak between September and November – including a 4-1 hammering of Bodo – had taken them to the summit of the table with just two games to play. At that stage, three teams were still in contention, with their bitter rivals Viking in third place.

However, a 2-1 defeat to Molde on the penultimate weekend put Bodo back in the driving seat on the final day. Brann's 1-1 draw at home to Viking – whose significantly inferior goal difference meant that they were already out of the title running – was rendered irrelevant by Bodo's emphatic 5-2 thrashing of Lillestrom, which ensured the title would stay up north.

Norwegian champions... Bodo/Glimt

Yet arguably the biggest story from that game came from the beaten side. Champions of Norway five times, Lillestrom endured a season to forget in 2024, capping a chaotic recent history by suffering relegation.

The club have employed eight different managers since July 2023, including the untimely loss of Swede Andreas Georgson to Manchester United to take up a position as a set-piece coach. When he departed in July, Lillestrom were eighth in the 16-team league. Rocked by this unforeseen departure, they went into free-fall, collecting just five more points all season. Ultimately, they paid the price for failing to replace last season's top scorer Akor Adams, who formed an effective strike partnership with Thomas Lehne Olsen before leaving for Montpellier in August 2023. Left to lead the line by himself, 33-year-old Lehne Olsen did well to return nine league goals, but it was not enough to rescue his team from the drop.

Lillestrom can take encouragement – although absolutely no happiness – from the performance of their arch-rivals Valerenga. In 2023, it was their turn to reflect on a shock relegation from the top flight, sent down after losing agonisingly in the play-offs. But they have bounced back in 2024, topping the second tier in a dominant fashion that Lillestom will hope to emulate in 2025.

Also coming up from the second tier are Bryne, the club where Erling Haaland started, who will play in the top flight again for the first time since 2003.

Elsewhere, another Eliteserien institution, Odd BK, joined Lillestrom in falling through the trapdoor, thus ending their 15-year stay in the top flight. They went down with a whimper, scoring just 26 times in 30 matches and winning only one of their last 13 games. The oldest club in the country, their demotion is the latest example of the topsy-turvy nature of Norwegian football in recent years, where the historic clubs are always vulnerable to the drop and newly-promoted sides can be competitive. Yet, amongst the unpredictability, Bodo/Glimt continue to set the standards.

Josh Butler

TENSIONS FLARE IN NAIL-BITING TITLE DECIDER

Few countries across Europe will witness a more thrilling conclusion to this season's title race than Iceland. Second-placed Breidablik went into the final round trailing opponents Vikingur Reykjavik on goal difference and needing an away win to overtake the league leaders and become national champions for the third time in their history. Breidablik ultimately made it look easy, running out 3-0 victors and dethroning their arch-rivals in dramatic fashion – but that only told half the story.

Tensions on the final day were heightened by Breidablik supporters reportedly breaking into the match venue in Reykjavik the night before in protest at their meagre allocation of away tickets. Between 250 and 300 wooden pallets – which had been brought in to temporarily boost capacity for the title showdown – were spray-painted in Breidablik green and caused an estimated €10,000 worth of damage in the process. Vikingur subsequently filed a complaint, but the Icelandic FA ruled that the act occurred outside the scope of the match and opted not to penalise the visitors.

Former champions ...Vikingur were pipped to the title by rivals Breidablik

It was a bittersweet week for Vikingur, who only three days earlier had become the first Icelandic club to win a match in the group or league phase of a European competition by defeating Cercle Brugge 3-1 in the UEFA Conference League.

At the time of writing, their European status was still to be decided. If they do make it into the knockout rounds, they will have to prepare without any competitive match practice; the Icelandic league's off-season is the longest in Europe, lasting from October until April.

Lee Wingate

KAIRAT CLINCH TITLE AFTER UNFORGETTABLE BATTLE

The 2024 Kazakhstan Premier League season will live long in the memory thanks to an epic title race that went right down to the wire. With just a few games to play, more than half the league had a chance of being crowned champions.

Ultimately, Kairat emerged victorious to claim their first league title in four years while record seven-time champions Astana narrowly missed out. The fact that no team managed to average even two points per game should illustrate what a topsy-turvy campaign this was.

At the midway stage of the season, defending champions Ordabasy had built up a decent lead. Fresh from winning their very first top-flight title in 2023, they lost just one of their first 13 league matches to go five points clear of five-time champions Aktobe. However, Ordabasy then found themselves in the unfamiliar territory of having to balance their domestic duties alongside a continental campaign. This proved to be their undoing, as they won just one league fixture across July and August and were eliminated from the third round of the Conference League qualifiers, losing home and away to Armenia's Pyunik. By the time they could afford to reset, their lead had been wiped out and they never got back on track. Three consecutive defeats leading up to the final day knocked them out for good.

For a brief moment, newly-promoted Elimai inherited the lead. Having won the second tier in their very first season of existence, the Semey-based club might have started to dream of an unthinkable double, but their hopes were rudely dashed. Their inexperience seemed to hold them back in the end as they lost all four fixtures in the last month of the season to drop down to sixth.

All this while, Astana were quietly working on mounting a title charge. After a poor first half of the season in which they accumulated just 15 points in 12 games, they won eight out of nine matches from September onwards. Having qualified for the Conference League group stage – overcoming Milsami Orhei (Moldova), Corvinul Hunedoara (Romania) and Brann (Norway) in the qualifying rounds – their continental commitments forced a couple of their league matches to be postponed, meaning that they always had some games in hand on their rivals.

Better times...Shakhter Karagandy got to the Champions League play-offs in 2013

Their fate was in their own hands until November, when a shock loss to Tobol proved to be a knockout blow. Kairat, whose form had been patchy but just about acceptable throughout the season, won five of their last six league fixtures (complete with a scrappy 1-0 win against the ten men of Atyrau on the final day) to clinch the title by just one point.

There was a fair bit of drama at the bottom of the standings too, although all of it took place before the season. Maktaaral's licence was not renewed for the season due to financial issues, while numerous potential replacements were also rejected for similar reasons. Ultimately, the season was played one team short with just one relegation spot, which was surprisingly occupied by two-time champions Shakhter Karagandy for the very first time in their history. Mismanagement has been cited as the chief cause of their problems so, while close competition rages at the top of the KPL, it is perhaps masking some serious concerns lower down the table and pyramid.

Neel Shelat

MATCH-FIXING SCANDAL COMES HOME TO ROOST FOR SHAKHTYOR SOLIGORSK

Belarus does not often make global football headlines. Rare examples include when Diego Maradona was appointed chairman of Dynamo Brest in 2018, or when the league became one of only four worldwide – along with Burundi, Nicaragua and Tajikistan – to continue at the height of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. More recently, in May 2023, it was announced that three top-flight clubs would be sanctioned for their roles in a match-fixing scandal.

Energetik-BGU Minsk and Belshina Bobruisk were hit both with sanctions, but it was reigning champions Shakhtyor Soligorsk who drew the harshest punishment. The 2020 and 2021 title winners were stripped of their 2022 crown, fined heavily and hit with an eye-watering points deduction: 35 points in that season and a further 20 points for the 2024 campaign. They immediately dropped from the upper echelons of the table into the relegation zone.

Ultimately, they clung on to stay up in 2023 – largely thanks to the fact that the other two sanctioned clubs finished below them. To put Shakhtyor's status in the league into context, that was the first time they'd finished outside the top three since 2009.

But surviving a second season with a significant points deduction proved to be a bridge too far. Shakhtyor were never able to make up the ground on the rest of the pack and, after a run of only one win from their first nine games after the league restart in August, were condemned to relegation in early October 2024.

Rock bottom... Shakhtyor Soligorsk

Their demotion means champions Dinamo Minsk (who claimed their ninth national title), Neman Grodno and Dynamo Brest will continue as the only three clubs to play in every top-flight season since Belarus gained independence in 1991.

It now remains to be seen how Shakhtyor fare in the First League, Belarus' second tier. Also currently operating under a transfer ban, the Miners are only able to offer new contracts to existing players or promote youngsters from their reserve and academy teams.

But there is still a faint ray of hope: If the promoted teams from the second division do not meet Premier League requirements, perhaps Shakhtyor will cling onto their top-flight status after all.

Lee Wingate

BEST OF THE REST

Swedish champions ...Malmo players lift the trophy *Credit: Alamy*

In the 100th year of the Allsvenskan, the top flight of **Sweden**, it was highly appropriate that the country's most successful domestic club, Malmo (27 league titles), enjoyed the honour of topping the pile in 2024. The Sky Blues, who finished an impressive 11 points ahead of runners-up Hammarby to claim their fourth title in five seasons, had two driving forces: ever-reliable former Leeds United centre-back Pontus Jansson and the flamboyant midfielder Sebastian Nanasi, who earned himself a move to Ligue 1 Strasbourg in August.

Like Malmo, **Latvian** outfit Riga FS had the immense satisfaction of claiming back-to-back titles. RFS, who won their first national crown as recently as 2021, had to grit their teeth to prevail, pushed all the way by capital city rivals FC Riga and left short of numbers in attack after their Ivorian-Brazilian combo of Ismael Diomande and Emerson Deocleciano were sidelined with serious injuries in the run-in. RFS also claimed the national cup, narrowly beating Auda in the final.

Elsewhere in the Baltic, Zalgiris were once again laying down the law in **Lithuania**, securing their eighth domestic championship in 12 campaigns. Extremely consistent and well-organised, Zalgiris featured some of the best performers in the country, not least marauding Congolese/French left-back Joel Bopesu and a pair of Romanian stand-outs in goalscoring winger Liviu Antal and goalkeeper Arpad Tordai.

Further to the north, **Estonia**'s nouveau riche powerhouse Levadia proved too strong for the rest of the Meistriliiga pack, strolling to their 11th national title in 25 years as a top-flight side. Shrewdly marshalled by the former Valencia defender Curro Torres, they lifted the domestic cup too, beating Paide Linnameeskond in the final.

In **Finland**, Kuopion Palloseura, more commonly known as KuPS, completed the clean sweep of both the domestic league championship (Veikkausliiga) and national cup, the club's first-ever domestic double. Next season, the Canaries will have to do without iconic coach Jani Honkavaara, who will be concentrating on his new duties as assistant manager of the Finland national team.

Malmo hero... Sebastian Nanasi joined Ligue 1 outfit Strasbourg in August

Faroe Islands reigning champions KI Klaksvik, expected to defend their title this year, inexplicably imploded in the opening rounds of the season, losing two of their first five fixtures. Despite ending the season with an impressive 11-game winning run, it was not enough to catch eventual champions Vikingur, whose outstanding blend of gritty seniors and exciting young starlets set the tone for a triumphant campaign with just two defeats in their opening 19 fixtures.

The biggest story in **Georgia** was the dismal campaign of Dinamo Tbilisi. The winners of 19 national pennants since independence, the former giants of the old Soviet Union turned dreary underachievement into an art form in 2024, so poor that relegation was even a possibility at one point. Their usual rivals Dinamo Batumi, champions twice in the last five season and runners-up in the other three, were miles off the pace too, blowing the title race wide open. Up stepped another Tbilisi club, Iberia 1999, who made stunning tracks from mid-table mediocrity in 2023 to top spot in 2024.

Nick Bidwell

SERBIA

Eternal Derby...fans watch the Belgrade derby between Red Star and Partizan

2024-25 TEAMS

- Cukaricki Belgrade
- IMT Belgrade
- Jedinstvo Ub
- Mladost Lucani
- Napredak Krusevac
- Novi Pazar
- OFK Belgrade
- Partizan Belgrade
- Radnicki 1923 Kragujevac
- Radnicki Nis
- Red Star Belgrade
- Spartak Subotica
- TSC Backa Topola
- Tekstilac Odzaci
- Vojvodina Novi Sad
- Zeleznicar Pancevo

SUPERLIGA – A BRIEF HISTORY

The Serbian league is a successor to the previous leagues in former Yugoslavia and Serbia & Montenegro. Since its first season back in 2006-07 it has been dominated by the two Belgrade arch-rivals, Red Star and Partizan, adding to the titles they accumulated in previous leagues (Red Star 35, Partizan 27). For 18 years, no other club has come close – not even Serbia's third club, Vojvodina Novi Sad, who won two Yugoslavian titles when the league was far more competitive. One runners-up spot and seven third-place finishes are the height of their SuperLiga achievements. Recently, Cukaricki Belgrade and TSC Backa Topola have established themselves as top-four contenders, but there is still a big gap to the top.

THE FORMAT

After the regular league season (30 rounds) the top eight clubs play another seven fixtures against each other in the play-off for the title and European places, while the bottom eight clubs battle against relegation. After seven rounds, the two bottom clubs go down to the second tier, with the 13th and 14th-placed clubs entering a relegation-promotion play-off against the third and fourth-placed clubs from the second tier.

HONOURS BOARD*

Club	*Title wins*	*Runners-up*	*Last title*
Red Star Belgrade	10	7	2023-24
Partizan Belgrade	8	8	2016-17
Vojvodina Novi Sad	-	1	-
Radnicki Nis	-	1	-
TSC Backa Topola	-	1	-

**Since 2006 and the Serbian SuperLiga's formation only*

Red Star Belgrade have won seven league titles in a row – can anyone stop their dominance?
It would be nice if more clubs were able to compete for the league title to make the competition more attractive and more exciting for supporters, but in Serbia the chances of this happening are practically zero. The only club that has any chance of stopping Red Star's dominance are city rivals Partizan. It won't be this campaign as Red Star are already runaway leaders, but next season it's possible that Partizan could give Red Star a run for their money.

Latest events in and around the club indicate that Partizan could soon bounce back. Namely, their chairman Milorad Vucelic and chief executive Milos Vazura were forced to resign, replaced by a (for now provisional) new board with former Real Madrid sporting director Predrag Mijatovic in a leading role.

At this point, Partizan are in a miserable state, both financially and sportingly, but their fans hope and believe that Mijatovic and his team will succeed in turning things around.

Where does the Serbian league currently rank in Europe?
Back in summer 2023, local media reported with delight about Serbia's 11th place in UEFA's league coefficient rankings. Such a high position had been secured thanks to the good results achieved by both Red Star and Partizan in previous campaigns. Last season was a landmark year as, for the first time ever, the Serbian champions (Red Star) automatically qualified for the Champions League group stage and five clubs, rather than four, earned the right to play in Europe.

However, it quickly became clear that such a high ranking was deceptive, and not indicative of the quality of the league. After a disastrous record (five wins, three draws and 43 defeats) by Serbian clubs since the start of last season, Serbia's ranking is back to a much more realistic position of 20th.

What are the biggest issues facing the Serbian league?
There are a myriad of issues and it is impossible to go into major detail about all of the numerous problems, but in summary: poor interest, low attendances, modest quality, ongoing doubts and rumours about match-fixing and biased referees, poor infrastructure, political interference, hooliganism and lack of financial resources for some clubs to be competitive.

As for the latter, some clubs that get promoted to the SuperLiga do not even have a stadium that meets top-tier standards and therefore have to play their home games at other clubs' grounds. That's the case this season with OFK Belgrade, who play their home games in Zajecar, a town 251km from Belgrade, as well as with IMT Belgrade (promoted the season before) who play in Loznica, 143km away from Serbia's captial city.

Recently there were reports of a plan to reduce the first tier from 16 to 12 clubs, a plan that makes sense. If it goes through, it could happen at the earliest in 2026 or 2027.

In addition to Andrija Maksimovic, who are the other young talents that could emerge from the league?
Veljko Ilic (21) is a tall goalkeeper who graduated from Red Star's youth academy. The champions released him four years ago, but probably regret it now: he is the undisputed No.1 at TSC Backa Topola and one of the best keepers in the league. Consistent and mentally strong, he is already a member of Serbia's national squad.

Red Star right-back Ognjen Mimovic (20) is also one to watch, having established himself as a regular this season before suffering a foot injury in his Champions League debut against Benfica in mid-September.

Mihajlo Cvetkovic (17), from Cukaricki Belgrade, is an attacker who recently compared his style of play to his striking idols Sergio Aguero, Lautaro Martinez and Roberto Firmino, while Red Star's Jovan Sljivic (19) is a creative central midfielder patiently waiting for more playing time.

Vladimir Novak

ONE TO WATCH

Andrija MAKSIMOVIC

(Red Star Belgrade)

2024 was a great year for the 17-year-old attacking midfielder. First, he helped Serbia reach the Under-17 European Championship semi-finals, then he broke into Red Star's first team and even made his Champions League debut where he impressed in a 4-0 defeat to Internazionale at the San Siro. A couple of weeks later his international debut followed in the UEFA Nations League against Switzerland. His calmness on the ball and sweet left foot quickly put him on the radar of big European clubs and it's almost certain that he will leave Belgrade next summer. In November, he scored an amazing free-kick against Vojvodina.

Dominant...Red Star celebrate with last season's league title

Glenn Moore

Orlando Pride crowned 2024 NWSL champions

Florida club produce stunning result under the guidance of former Middlesbrough and Orlando City defender Seb Hines

One of the ironies of the NWSL using a play-off system to decide the winner is that, of all the major women's leagues, it is the one that least needs such a system. With five different champions in as many years, the regular season NWSL Shield is far more competitive than the leagues in England, Spain, France and Germany, who have only mustered six title winners between them in that time.

The league's competitiveness was underlined when Orlando Pride went from seventh in 2023 to first in 2024. They started the campaign with a 23-match unbeaten run and ended it with a series of wins too, to become only the third team (after North Carolina Courage in 2018 and 2019) to win both the Shield and Championship in the same year.

It really was a victory from nowhere. This was only the second time Orlando had finished in the league's top six, after coming third in 2017 when they made the play-off semi-finals.

The one survivor from that era is the greatest player in women's soccer history, Marta, who stayed in Florida when so many others moved on to more successful outfits. The Brazilian confessed that she had often asked herself why she was still playing in Orlando. "Now I have the answer," she said after a 1-0 win over Washington Spirit in the final, a match she had described as the most important of her career.

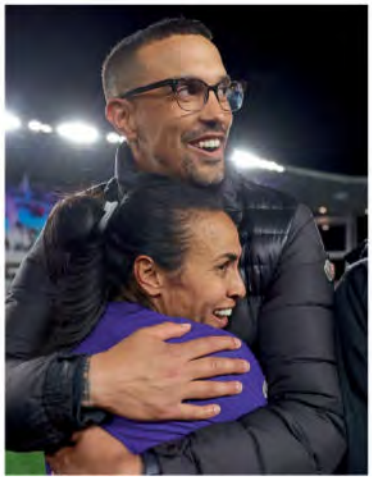
Now 38, Marta had also conjured a goal for the ages against Kansas City Current in the play-off semi-final, a jinking, weaving run that left four defenders on their backsides and proved the difference in a 3-2 win.

The team's other star is Barbra Banda, a £580,000 pre-season signing from Shanghai Shengli. The Zambian striker scored the final's only goal, her 17th of the season and fourth of the play-offs. She took advantage, first of a generous refereeing decision that allowed Brazil's Angelina to send her away, then of some poor defending and goalkeeping, to score low at the near post.

"I said to her: 'Big players show up in the big games'," Marta, Banda's childhood hero, revealed afterwards. "She did today."

While Orlando played direct to Banda, Spirit were producing the passing triangles expected of a team coached by former Barcelona supremo Jonatan Giraldez. But though they kept probing, they were sorely missing their creative force Croix Bethune. The 2024 Rookie of the Year had suffered a freak knee injury throwing the ceremonial first pitch for Washington Nationals baseball team, tearing her meniscus.

> It really was a victory from nowhere. This was only the second time Orlando had finished in the league's top six



Pride heroes... manager Seb Hines with the talismanic Marta

Lead striker Trinity Rodman was also not fully fit. Spirit had 26 attempts, but the league's tightest defence – well marshalled by Pride's only current US international, Emily Sams – restricted them to just five on target. And those were saved by Emma Moorhouse, whose form at Pride has won her a place in the England squad.

Orlando's success was a triumph for 36-year-old Englishman Seb Hines, the first black coach to win the National Women's Soccer League Championship. The ex-Middlesbrough defender took over on a temporary basis in 2022 and, given time and investment, has turned things around at the club.

The venue for the final was Kansas City Current's CPKC – the first stadium purpose-built for women's soccer. Built on the banks of the Missouri at a cost of $117 million (£93m), it was originally slated to hold 6,000 before being scaled up to 11,500, but the club must now feel that that was conservative having become the first NWSL team to sell out every match of the season.

They were one of seven clubs to average five-figure gates, topped by San Diego Wave's 19,575, with six establishing record seasonal averages. Even the lowest, 6,194 at bottom club Houston Dash, would have been in the top three for every season until 2022.

With 14 teams and an expanded

NWSL champions ...Orlando Pride forward Marta lifts the trophy

schedule, total attendance was up 47 per cent to pass the two million mark with an average 11,250 per game, the highest for a women's soccer league globally.

The league, which began with eight clubs in 2013 and had nine as recently as 2020, continues to expand. Two more franchises will join in 2026, one in Boston (the proposed name, BOS Nation FC, is now under review), and the other in one of Cincinnati, Cleveland or Denver. Further expansion is likely in 2028 and beyond.

Losses are also up, averaging $5-10m per club, underlining the risk that, as in many other leagues, more income simply translates to more spending on wages and transfers. Still, there are a number of checks in NWSL preventing reckless spending. Add in that much of the investment comes from private equity companies, which aim to make a profit rather than bask in reflected glory, plus a block on sovereign wealth funds, costs should be kept under control.

Nevertheless, larger rewards bring greater temptation, as was underlined when Angel City were sanctioned for violating the salary cap. The fact that the NWSL fined them $200,000, docked three points, and suspended key executives indicates they are keen to ensure the gold rush does not become a wild west.

Round-up

Into the quarters... Lyon players celebrate during a win over Roma

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL EIGHT TAKES EARLY SHAPE

With two rounds still to play at the time of writing, seven of the eight quarter-final places in the Champions League were known with only the Group A runners-up spot still to be decided.

Lyon had secured their last-eight place for the tenth season in a row by winning their first four games, which included beating both Roma and Wolfsburg, who were contesting the remaining qualifying place.

Chelsea and Real Madrid had sewn up Group B ahead of Twente and Celtic. This is Real's second qualification after reaching the last eight in 2021-22.

In Group C, Bayern Munich were held 1-1 by Valerenga but qualified along with Arsenal, who secured their spot with home-and-away wins over Juventus.

Manchester City, helped by their 2-0 home win over holders Barcelona, were through for the first time since 2020-21. Barca, having scored 20 goals in their next three games, had also booked a place for the tenth successive season.

Unlike last season, when clubs from the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Portugal had made the last eight, the qualifiers came exclusively from the major leagues. The trio of WSL clubs to progress marks the first time one country has had three clubs in the last eight.

TP MAZEMBE CROWNED QUEENS OF AFRICA

TP Mazembe of the Democratic Republic of Congo won the African Champions League, upsetting Moroccan hosts AS FAR in the final.

Defending champions Mamelodi Sundowns (South Africa) were eliminated in the group stage after defeats to two debutants, FC Masar (Egypt) and Edo Queens (Nigeria).

AS FAR, the 2022 winners, had beaten TP Mazembe 3-1 to top Group A, but then lost 1-0 when it mattered to an early Marlene Kasaj penalty when the pair met again in the final in El Jadida. Edo Queens defeated Masar on penalties after a goalless draw to take third place.

The Ravens took home $600,000 in prize money after claiming the title.

NAEHER RETIRES FROM US DUTY

Goalkeeper Alyssa Naeher played her 115th and final game for the USA in December, a 2-1 win v the Netherlands. The Chicago Red Stars keeper bows out as a two-time world champion, Olympic gold and bronze medallist and with seven SheBelieves Cups and three CONCACAF crowns under her belt.

FIFA SEEK OLYMPICS EXPANSION

FIFA are pushing to expand the women's Olympic soccer tournament from 12 to 16 teams, matching the men's event. The Los Angeles Games in 2028 would seem ideal for such a move, given the sport's profile in the USA. Medal winners would still play six games, although even that fixture load drew criticism at Paris 2024.

2025 NATIONS LEAGUE DRAW

The main headline from the draw for the second edition of the UEFA Nations League, which kicks off in February, saw world champions Spain paired with England. The full draw is as follows...

League A
Group A1: Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Scotland
Group A2: France, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland
Group A3: Spain, England, Belgium, Portugal
Group A4: Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Wales

League B
Group B1: Poland, Northern Ireland, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Romania
Group B2: Republic of Ireland, Turkey, Slovenia, Greece
Group B3: Finland, Serbia, Hungary, Belarus
Group B4: Czech Republic, Ukraine, Croatia, Albania

League C
Group C1: Slovakia, Faroe Islands, Moldova, Gibraltar
Group C2: Malta, Georgia, Cyprus, Andorra
Group C3: Luxembourg, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein
Group C4: Azerbaijan, Montenegro, Lithuania
Group C5: Israel, Bulgaria, Estonia
Group C6: Kosovo, Latvia, North Macedonia

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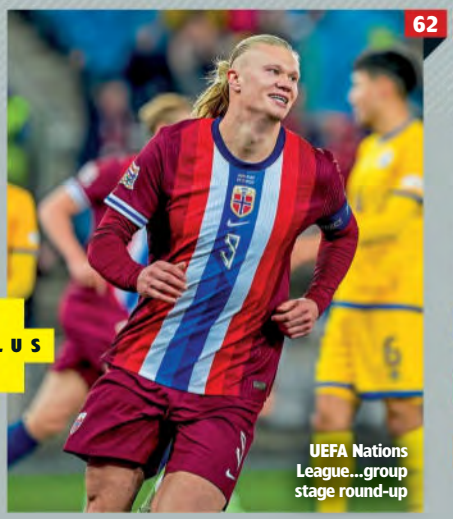

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Europe

NICK BIDWELL

UEFA Nations League round-up

Group stage of 2024-25 campaign concludes with few surprises

LEAGUE A Shocks were few and far between in the battle for the quarter-final berths in League A. Three nations – Spain, Portugal and Germany – finished undefeated in the autumn, all group winners and all genuine contenders for the UEFA Nations League title.

Even when deprived of a host of star names – Rodri, Dani Carvajal, Nico Williams and Robin Le Normand – freshly minted European champions Spain continue to impress while Portugal, who underlined their state of rude health with a 5-1 thrashing of Poland in Porto on Matchday 5, may come in for criticism domestically but they remain a powerhouse.

Germany are clearly on an upward path after a lengthy barren spell. Full marks to *Bundestrainer* Julian Nagelsmann, who not only has the team playing with considerably more verve and positivity, but has done so while overseeing a host of personnel changes. It says much for Nagelsmann's system that all the new faces have settled in straight away. Expect the hype machine to crank

Unbeaten... Spain will be favourites to defend their title

Top scorer...Sweden ace Viktor Gyokeres

Promotion... Wales advanced from League B in Craig Bellamy's first campaign in charge

up about the likes of midfield schemers Aleksandar Pavlovic (Bayern Munich) and Angelo Stiller (Stuttgart), speedy winger Jamie Leweling (also of Stuttgart) and Borussia Monchengladbach striker Tim Kleindienst, who struck a brace in November's 7-0 thumping of Bosnia & Herzegovina.

France, still suffering with a creativity deficit and the safety-first ethos of long-serving coach Didier Deschamps, had to dig deep to secure first place in their League A group, pulling the fat out of the fire courtesy of a 3-1 victory in Italy on the final matchday, thus snatching top spot from the *Azzurri* on goal difference. Aston Villa full-back Lucas Digne proved the hero of the night, setting up two goals for Adrien Rabiot and letting fly with a vicious free-kick which was deflected into his own net by Italy goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario.

Italy will be joined in the last eight by three other group runners-up: Croatia – who guaranteed their ticket with a second-half Josko Gvardiol equaliser in a 1-1 draw at home to Portugal – the Netherlands and Denmark, the latter sealing the deal with a goalless draw away to closest challengers Serbia.

Defiance and belief stood Scotland in good stead in the final throes of their League A campaign, a late 2-1 win in Poland saving Steve Clarke's side from direct relegation. Thanks to a last-gasp header by Andy Robertson in Warsaw, the Scots can now look forward to a League A/B play-offs rendezvous in March alongside Austria, Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine (play-off draw on page 91).

League A stragglers Poland, Israel, Bosnia & Herzegovina and a mysteriously under-par Switzerland have a relegation forfeit to pay.

LEAGUE B

As most pundits would have predicted, England were one of the four teams to earn direct promotion from League B, despite October's shock 2-1 defeat at home to Greece. The Greeks, shrewdly assembled and set up by new coach Ivan Jovanovic, certainly did all they could to upset the apple cart, but ultimately were helpless to prevent England re-establish dominance in their final two fixtures – a 3-0 win in Athens and a 5-0 romp against the Republic of Ireland – to seal top spot by virtue of a superior head-to-head goal difference.

Wales also secured promotion from League B. And what a magical group denouement it was for Craig Bellamy's side, coming from behind to beat Iceland 4-1 in Cardiff, while group rivals Turkey spectacularly lost their nerve, beaten 3-1 by the previously winless Montenegro.

> Even when deprived of a host of star names, freshly minted European champions Spain continue to impress

Norway, energised by a seven-goal contribution from superstar striker Erling Haaland, also clambered aboard the promotion train, as did the Czech Republic, who cemented top spot in an evenly-contested group with a 2-1 home win over Georgia on Matchday 6.

Georgia, Iceland, Republic of Ireland and Slovenia will contest the League B/C play-offs. Albania, Finland, Kazakhstan and Montenegro now must ready themselves for the third tier.

LEAGUE C

Star of the show in the third tier was Sweden's in-vogue goal machine Viktor Gyokeres, who piled up no fewer than nine goals as his country secured promotion as Group C1 top dogs. Four of his remarkable haul came in his team's 6-0 hammering of Azerbaijan in the final round of fixtures.

Northern Ireland and North Macedonia won Groups 3 and 4 respectively, but Group 2 was more complicated. The Romania-Kosovo tie in Bucharest on the penultimate matchday was abandoned at 0-0 during second-half stoppage-time, after the Kosovan players walked off in response to alleged discriminatory chanting from the home fans. UEFA subsequently awarded Romania a 3-0 win by way of forfeit. The Romanians were thus confirmed as undefeated pool winners, earning promotion to League B, while runners-up Kosovo will take part in the League B/C play-offs.

Armenia, Bulgaria and Slovakia also each have a League B/C play-off ticket, while Latvia and Luxembourg head for the League C/D play-offs. Winless Azerbaijan and Lithuania are bound for League D.

LEAGUE D

Moldova and San Marino – the latter of whom recorded their first victory in two decades when beating Liechtenstein 1-0 in September, and then won their first-ever away game in the return tie (3-1 in November) – achieved promotion to League C after topping their League D groups.

Malta and especially Gibraltar will hope for much better fortune in the League C/D play-offs. In the same group as San Marino, Gibraltar did not lose any of their four fixtures and came within a whisker of beating the Sammarinese on their own patch in November, leading 1-0 for most of the game before being pegged back by a stoppage-time penalty. Heartbreak for the Gibraltarians.

Results, line-ups, final standings and play-off draws from page 88 onwards.

South America

TIM VICKERY

Six of the best

After two thirds of South America's World Cup qualifying campaign, the top six have pulled clear from the chasing pack

Top of the table...world champions Argentina are currently five points clear of second-placed Uruguay

South America's 2026 World Cup qualifiers look well on the way to definition. Six teams will make it through automatically to the next World Cup in North America, and a gap has opened up between the current top six and the rest. The surprise is that Paraguay are among them.

The table shows one major change from this time last year after the first six rounds. Venezuela have fallen – plummeting from fourth place to eighth. In the six frenetic rounds played between September and November, they picked up just three points. Everyone else picked up more, and the team that did best was Paraguay, with 12.

This represents a remarkable turnaround. A year ago, Paraguay had managed just one goal from the first six rounds. And then they were bundled out of the Copa America after losing all three group games. Following that debacle it was time for the entrance of Gustavo Alfaro, their third coach of the campaign. The low-key Argentine, who did such an impressive job with Ecuador in the last cycle, proved an instant hit with Paraguay. Aided by the return to fitness of Brighton forward Julio Enciso, he has been able to combine traditional Paraguayan defensive resilience with a dangerous counter-attack, and his team are now within sight of a first World Cup since 2010.

The five teams above Paraguay are, of course, even closer. But this does not doom their remaining rounds to irrelevance. A common theme is the need for tough games to whip a team into shape for 2026. This even applies to leaders Argentina, whose total of 25 points should already be good enough to ensure qualification. Even so, there is a fear that Lionel Scaloni's side may have peaked, that Angel Di Maria will be impossible to replace and that time might catch up with Lionel Messi.

Uruguay, in second, would appear to have recovered from a rough few months, and Marcelo Bielsa will hope to rediscover the groove of late 2023, when his side beat both Brazil and Argentina.

Third placed Ecuador have probably been the most solid side on the continent, with a splendid defensive unit. Their 1-0 win away to Colombia might be the most impressive display by anyone so far, both for the early dominance and for the way they held their opponents at bay for over an hour with ten men. But they could still do with a regular goalscorer to ease the pressure on Enner Valencia.

Colombia in fourth must now deal with the first mini-crisis in the reign of Nestor Lorenzo. The long unbeaten run has gone. They have lost three of the last four, and are away to Brazil at the end of March in the next round.

And Brazil are understandably very disappointed with fifth place. Their rapid wingers are capable of exhilarating moments. But it can all be too frenetic and direct, with not enough passing subtlety – and with a midfield that looks alarmingly open. In almost every game, they are conceding goals because the opposition is given too much space in front of Brazil's defensive line. There is plenty of work ahead, then, if under pressure coach Dorival Junior is to keep his promise and produce a side that will play in the 2026 final.

> **A year ago, Paraguay had managed just one goal from the first six rounds…now they are within sight of a first World Cup since 2010**

The top six, then, would appear to have hauled themselves into a position where long-term planning is possible. Below them, there promises to be an almighty scrap in the battle to finish seventh, and claim the play-off slot.

Ahead in the race at the moment are Bolivia, another team on their third coach of the campaign. Oscar Villegas has the advantage of even more extreme altitude than usual; Bolivia have moved their home

Update

Surprise packages... Paraguay impressed in the latest World Cup qualifying action

base from La Paz up to El Alto – which literally translates to "The Tall", and sits 4,150m above sea level – and are banking on winning their three remaining home games.

A point behind them are Venezuela, who have now gone eight qualifiers without a win and have suffered the most from the resurgence of both Paraguay and Bolivia. The Venezuelans are also very strong at home. They are unbeaten in Maturin, having held giants Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil to draws there over the last few months and, with an easier run of home fixtures, the dream of a World Cup debut has not expired just yet.

Outstanding display ...Ecuador impressed in their 1-0 victory against Colombia in Barranquilla

The situation would look better had they not just been beaten 4-2 by Chile, on a night when winger Lucas Cepeda showed promise that Chile have been missing from their young players for years. Despite a dreadful recent run, that victory keeps Ricardo Gareca's side in touch with the play-off place.

That play-off spot means that even bottom-of-the-table Peru can keep some hope alive, despite scoring just three goals in 12 games. Their fate hangs on the double header in March, when they are at home to Bolivia and away to Venezuela.

Results, line-ups and latest standings on page 88.

Asia

JOHN DUERDEN

As good as there...Japan are nine points clear at the top of Group C

Update

All to play for

The third round group stage of Asia's 2026 World Cup qualifying campaign is set for an exciting conclusion six matchdays in

After six games out of ten played in Asia's third round of qualification for the 2026 World Cup, just one point separates second in Group C (Australia) and sixth and last (China). All five teams are very much in the hunt for automatic World Cup qualification. The four remaining matchdays, played in March and June 2025, are going to be epic.

The Asian Football Confederation gets plenty of criticism for plenty of things but has got World Cup qualification completely right, at least in the latter stages (there is still an issue with the ten teams that lose in the first round being eliminated after just two games). There are 18 teams remaining and fighting for Asia's expanded automatic World Cup allocation of eight. The top two from each of the three groups go straight to North America but the teams that finish third and fourth progress to the next stage to chase the final two places. It means that everyone is still in with a chance, although Kyrgyzstan and North Korea need to get going.

Not Japan. Samurai Blue are as good as there with 16 points in Group C, nine clear of Australia. It started with a 7-0 thrashing of China and a 5-0 away win against Bahrain, and it is all looking very smooth. The focus is on the five teams below who are all taking points off each other with glorious abandon as they battle for the runners-up spot. The quality of this quintet may be somewhat questionable but the excitement is clear.

Where to start? Australia come next. They began with a shock 1-0 defeat at home to Bahrain in September and then, after a 0-0 draw in Indonesia, Graham Arnold resigned as head coach to be replaced by Tony Popovic, the man who led Western Sydney Wanderers to an unlikely Asian Champions League triumph in 2014. He started well with a win against China and draws with Japan and Saudi Arabia but the Socceroos needed a 96th-minute equaliser to draw 2-2 in the return match in Bahrain to stay in second – but only just.

Like Australia, Saudi Arabia are also seeking a seventh World Cup appearance, have also not impressed

Pole position... South Korea are top of Group B

and have also changed coach. Roberto Mancini never seemed the right fit for Riyadh and left in October following an indifferent start. Herve Renard returned for a second spell but despite (or perhaps because of) trying to get the 2022 World Cup band back together, has not yet delivered the hoped-for new coach bounce. A goalless draw in Melbourne was welcomed but the 2-0 defeat in Indonesia was not. Now there are no goals in four games and Green Falcons supporters are getting worried.

Indonesians are feeling much happier after that November win in Jakarta. With the majority of the team now of Dutch heritage, the Southeast Asian side are a very different opposition than before. Coach Shin Tae-yong is downplaying chances of second place but while fourth would be welcomed a higher finish is more than possible.

Bahrain may feel the same. They have been unpredictable opponents, winning 1-0 in Australia one week and then losing 5-0 at home to Japan the next. A last-minute home defeat against China in November could prove costly. That was China's second successive win, a big turnaround after losing their first three games, and it has kept Branko Ivankovic in a job as head coach.

The Croatian led Iran to the 2006 World Cup and his former team are well on their way to the 2026 tournament and in control of Group A. That leaves Uzbekistan and the United Arab Emirates tussling for second. The former have 13 points, three behind the leaders and three ahead of the UAE. Uzbekistan have come close to the World Cup before only to fall at the final hurdle, but 13 points from six games suggests they have what it takes this time round. Asian champions Qatar were thrashed 5-0 by the UAE in November, leaving their hopes of a first-ever World Cup finals appearance achieved through the qualification process looking very shaky indeed.

The Asian Football Confederation gets plenty of criticism for plenty of things but has got World Cup qualification completely right

All six are in the running in Group B, even Palestine in sixth. With three draws and three defeats, they are only three points behind Oman in fourth. Two draws against South Korea – 0-0 in Seoul in September and then 1-1 in Amman, Jordan two months later – showed their fighting spirit but they need to find a win or two from somewhere.

Despite those two draws, Korea are in control thanks to winning the other four. Iraq are in second, just two points above Jordan with those two battling for second. It was neck and neck until Jordan let their lead slip against Kuwait in the sixth game. Still, there is plenty to play for.

Results and latest standings on page 88.

Shock result...UAE players celebrate during their 5-0 win over Qatar

Oceania

STEVE MENARY

New Zealand cruise into third round

All Whites dominate the group stage of Oceania World Cup qualifying, with final round to follow in March

New Zealand unsurprisingly romped through the second round of the Oceania qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup and remain strong favourites to take the one guaranteed final place on offer to the region, with a French overseas territory likely to claim a place in the inter-confederation play-offs.

The second round was staged across different venues, with Group A kicking off in Suva, Fiji. The hosts' veteran striker Roy Krishna, now 37, kept his unlikely dreams of a World Cup debut alive with the only goal to see off the Solomon Islands. New Caledonia also got off to a strong start, sealing a resounding 3-1 victory over Papua New Guinea whose coach Warren Moon had been replaced shortly before the series.

The two remaining matchdays took place in Port Moresby, PNG, who looked to have snatched a sensational 3-2 win over Fiji with a 94th minute goal from Lae City forward Raymond Gunemba, but Merrill Nand snatched an equaliser at the death for the Fijians.

With New Caledonia edging a tough 3-2 battle with the Solomon Islands courtesy of a winner from substitute Gerard Waia, PNG needed the French

Review

Torrential...Tahiti v Samoa was played on a waterlogged pitch
Credit: OFC Media via Phototek

Samoa head coach...Jess Ibrom
Credit: OFC Media via Phototek

territory to beat Fiji in the final game to sneak through.

Krishna, however, scored his third goal in three games with a first-half penalty to briefly put Fiji top of the group before Jean-Jacques Katrawa equalised. The 1-1 draw left New Caledonia as group winners, while PNG slumped to a 2-1 defeat to the Solomon Islands and Fiji took second spot.

Fiji head coach Rob Sherman said: "I'm reasonably pleased with the way we're playing but at times, such as the second half against New Caledonia, we stopped executing the game plan and let them back into the game."

Winning Group A was essential as this meant avoiding New Zealand in the next round. The Kiwis' experienced side lived up to their billing and coasted through Group B unbeaten and largely unchallenged.

Striker Chris Wood had been in fine form for English club Nottingham Forest and was second behind Erling Haaland in the Premier League scoring charts before the international break. Predictably, the veteran Kiwi proved too hot to handle for Tahiti, Vanuatu and Samoa.

Group B started off in Vanuatu's capital Port Vila, where New Zealand faced their toughest game against Tahiti. Elijah Just scored after two minutes but Samuel Garcia's side proceeded to give the Kiwis a test before Wood added a second and Ben Waine sealed the result only at the death.

Vanuatu started off with a game against Jess Ibrom's Samoa, who had emerged from the first round of qualifiers – overcoming American Samoa and Tonga – and played well before slipping to a 4-1 defeat.

After one round, the qualifiers relocated to New Zealand, giving an advantage to a side not in need of one. In Hamilton, the All Whites' second game was a rematch of the OFC Nations Cup final against Vanuatu, who had been beaten 3-0 on home soil in June and fared worse in New Zealand.

Vanuatu's Jordy Tasip scored a shock equaliser past New Zealand goalkeeper Max Crocombe, who plays in England for League One strugglers Burton Albion, but Darren Bazeley's team added four more before half-time, including two from Wood, and ran out 8-1 winners.

A downpour made the conditions difficult and Samoa coach Jess Ibrom suggested his side's earlier match at the same venue, a 3-0 defeat to Tahiti, should have been suspended.

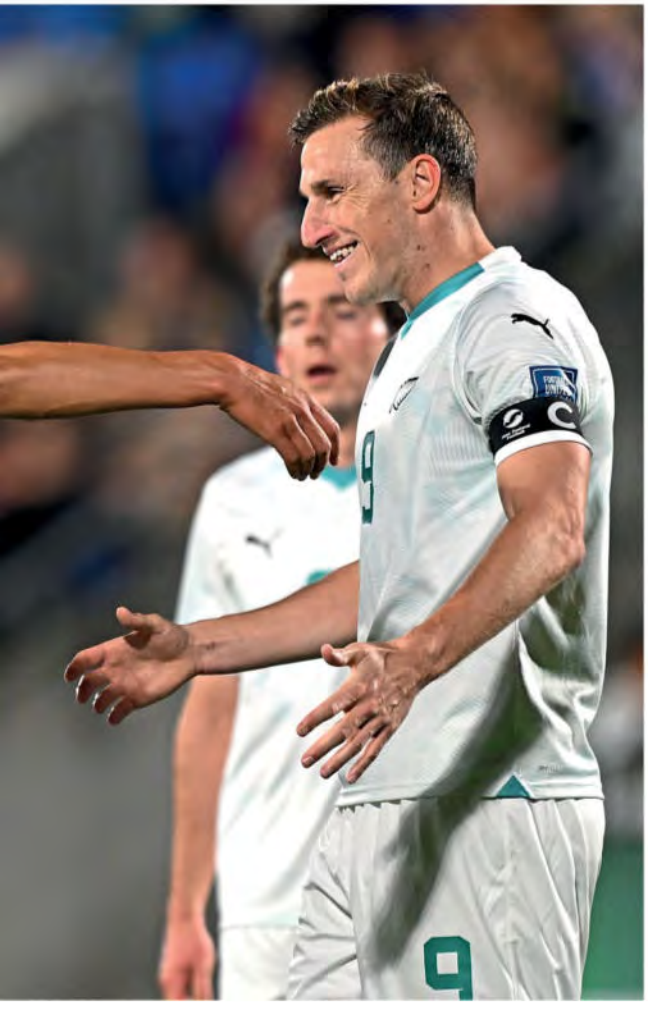
In the final games, played in Auckland, Kiwi keeper Crocombe made way for Alex Paulsen who easily kept a clean sheet against a Samoa side that battled bravely and were only 3-0 down at half-time. But with Wood scoring a hat-trick, New Zealand again hit eight to coast through. "We did well to keep New Zealand below double digits," added Ibrom.

The final round will be staged in Wellington, giving New Zealand another advantage for their semi-final against Fiji on March 21. "I'd say the odds are against us but how many times has the division three or four club knocked a division one club out the [English] FA Cup?" said Fiji boss Sherman. "So, it can be done providing we have the right preparation."

> **"We did well to keep New Zealand below double digits"**
> Samoa coach Jess Ibrom

The same day, New Caledonia take on Tahiti guaranteeing at least one French overseas territory a place in the final in Auckland three days later. The losers will travel to the USA for a four-game series along with two teams from CONCACAF and one each from Africa, Asia and South America for a place in the 2026 finals.

Results, final standings and third round fixtures on page 88.



Eight-goal thrashing... New Zealand players celebrate another goal v Samoa

Africa

MARK GLEESON

Ghana dumped out of AFCON qualifying

Black Stars are the biggest nation to miss out on the 2025 finals following quick-fire qualifying campaign packed with drama and shocks

Left out...Ghana captain Andre Ayew was omitted from the Black Stars' AFCON qualifiers

Ghana were the big losers in the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers, a rapid-fire three-month qualifying campaign that delivered multiple surprises before ultimately producing a formidable field for next year's finals tournament.

The 24 countries that booked berths must, however, now wait more than a year before the tournament in Morocco, which kicks off on December 21, 2025 and will finish on January 18, 2026.

Morocco participated in the preliminaries despite being guaranteed a berth as hosts and produced the only 100 per cent record, fuelled by the emergence of Real Madrid's Brahim Diaz as their new talisman. His seven goals in four matches made him the top scorer in qualifying, which kicked off in September and was completed by November in three international windows.

Holders Ivory Coast also coasted into the finals although finished second in their group behind Avram Grant's Zambia. Two teams from each of the 12 qualifying groups advanced except for Group B where Morocco participated and only one other side went through. That was Gabon with former African Footballer of the Year Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang back in the side to assist their progress.

Half of the field for the 2025 finals are past winners – Morocco, Cameroon, Algeria, DR Congo, Senegal, Egypt, Ivory Coast, South Africa, Tunisia, Nigeria,

Sudan and Zambia – but the absence of Ghana is a shock, particularly the limp fashion in which their campaign was conducted. Captain Andre Ayew was left out of the action, and despite being blessed with a host of Premier League stars in the form of Tariq Lamptey, Abdul Fatawu, Thomas Partey, Mohammed Kudus, Antoine Semenyo and Jordan Ayew, plus Athletic Club forward Inaki Williams, they still managed to finish bottom of Group F without a win. In a series of humiliating setbacks, the nadir was a 2-0 defeat to a Sudan side not only competing despite a civil war at home but also coached by a Ghanaian, Kwesi Appiah, who took the Black Stars to the 2014 World Cup finals in Brazil and was a full-back in the squad that brought Ghana their last AFCON success in 1982.

Ghana were still in the fight in their penultimate match away to Angola, and took the lead thanks to Jordan Ayew's breathtaking free-kick. But they wilted in the second half and conceded an equaliser to the subsequent table toppers.

That result confirmed their elimination, but at home in their last fixture against Niger they had a chance to make amends in front of their own fans, only to lose 2-1 and put the seal on a sorry campaign.

Coach Otto Addo is unlikely to still be in the post when Ghana return to action in March with the resumption of the 2026 World Cup qualifiers.

Indeed, there were several coaches who lost their jobs during the campaign, notably Aliou Cisse after nine years in charge of Senegal. But his removal had nothing to do with results but rather a refusal of the new government to renew his contract. As in several other African countries, the government pays the coach's salary and so rides roughshod over the football association when it comes to hiring and firing.

Veteran Faouzi Benzarti was shown the door by Tunisia after losing at home to the tiny Comoros Islands in October. His replacement, Kais Yaakoubi, then suffered the ignominy of another embarrassing home defeat to Gambia in their last game in November but still qualified for a record-extending 17th successive AFCON appearance.

There are no newcomers in the Cup of Nations field, but Comoros are back for a second stint after their 2021 finals debut in Cameroon, while Botswana will play for the first time since their inaugural outing in 2012. The latter's French coach Didier Gomes da Rosa quit to take up a club post in Libya and caretaker Morena Ramoreboli saw them through with an unlikely 1-1 draw away to Egypt.

New talisman... Brahim Diaz will star for hosts Morocco at AFCON 2025

Zimbabwe missed out on the last competition because of a FIFA ban but bounced back to qualify for a sixth finals appearance after hiring the German coach Michael Nees and finishing second to Cameroon in Group J.

The 2025 qualifying campaign, though, will likely be most remembered for a match that did not take place.

Ahead of Nigeria's qualifier in Libya, their incoming charter flight was diverted to a remote military airfield some 250km away from the intended destination of Benghazi.

Nigerian players and officials were left stranded for more than 16 hours, and after highlighting their plight on social media it quickly became an international incident. In the end, the furious Nigerians packed up and flew home, refusing to play the match. The Libyan Football Federation (LFF) firmly rejected any suggestions of foul play, but a CAF disciplinary board awarded Nigeria a 3-0 win and fined the LFF.

Despite the sanctions, Libya remained in contention when they hosted Benin in their last match, needing a win to qualify. It ended 0-0, a result that saw Benin through instead, which was particularly harsh on Rwanda who surprisingly beat Nigeria 2-1 away on the final matchday but missed out courtesy of their inferior head-to-head record against Benin.

Results and final group standings on pages 91-92.

> **The absence of Ghana is a shock, particularly the limp fashion in which their campaign was conducted**

Qualified...Benin will be making their first AFCON finals appearance since 2019 in Egypt

CONCACAF

JAMES NALTON

Bloodied... Mexico boss Javier Aguirre leaves the pitch after being struck by a beer can in Honduras

Review

Drama aplenty in Nations League

Each tier of the 2024-25 CONCACAF Nations League had excitement and jeopardy in the latest round of matches

There were plenty of loose ends to tie up in the latest round of action in the 2024-25 CONCACAF Nations League, from the headline acts and 2026 World Cup hosts Mexico, Canada and the United States in League A, to promotion and relegation in Leagues B and C, plus 2025 Gold Cup qualification.

LEAGUE A

As the League A knockout stages began, traditional big-hitters Mexico and the United States eventually turned on the style to overcome potentially tricky quarter-final ties against Honduras and Jamaica respectively.

The progress alongside them of Canada, who defeated Suriname, and Panama, who narrowly overcame Costa Rica, meant all four of the seeded teams given byes to the quarter-finals progressed to the semis.

These two-legged ties were Mauricio Pochettino's first competitive games as United States coach and his side eventually produced a convincing 5-2 aggregate win over Steve McClaren's Jamaica. Christian Pulisic brought his impressive Milan form to the international stage, scoring an excellent opener in the second leg and producing the follow-up that eventually went down as an own goal for Di'Shon Bernard.

For Pochettino, progress in the tournament was a welcome early triumph, especially as it came on the back of a friendly defeat to rivals Mexico in October – one of those international fixtures that is a friendly in name only.

Mexico were given a scare in their own quarter-final, as Celtic's Luis Palma gave Honduras a 2-0 first-leg advantage in San Pedro Sula. An upset looked on the cards.

That game was marred by an incident that saw Mexico coach Javier Aguirre leave the field with a bloody head having been hit by a beer can thrown from the stands. Aguirre played it down after the

US talisman... Christian Pulisic takes on Jamaica's Isaac Hayden

game, but it took some of the focus off a disappointing Mexico performance.

El Tri are looking to rebuild in Aguirre's third term as coach after he replaced Jaime Lozano following a Copa America group-stage exit in the summer. Aguirre will be in charge for the 2026 World Cup after which his assistant, former Barcelona defender Rafael Marquez, is primed to take over.

Mexico dominated the second leg against Honduras back at home in Toluca but still left it late to finish the job. The impressive and revived Fulham forward Raul Jimenez opened the scoring in the first half, but the goal to equalise on aggregate didn't come until the 72nd minute when sub Henry Martin turned home a Jimenez flick-on at a corner.

For new United States boss Mauricio Pochettino, progress in the tournament was a welcome early triumph

With five minutes to go, another sub, Jorge Sanchez, scored the goal to send Mexico through, before Martin added a fourth for good measure from the spot.

Mexico now face Canada in the March semi-finals after Jesse Marsch's team got the job done against one of CONCACAF's South American nations, Suriname. The Canadians won 1-0 in Paramaribo before asserting their dominance with a 3-0 victory in Toronto, featuring another standout performance from the man dubbed the "Maritime Messi", Jacob Shaffelburg, who scored a brace.

It sets up a pair of intriguing semi-final ties between teams that will fancy their chances against each other.

The Nations League also serves as a qualifier for the 2025 Gold Cup in June and the Gold Cup prelims in March. The League A quarter-final winners all qualify directly, while the losers drop into the prelims.

LEAGUE B

Teams winning their groups in League B secured the double triumph of promotion to League A and direct qualification for the Gold Cup.

Haiti were the most convincing of those, topping their group with six wins from six, scoring 29 goals and conceding just five. They'll be joined by El Salvador, Curacao and the Dominican Republic at the Gold Cup, and in Nations League A next time around.

It will be a first-ever Gold Cup appearance for the Dominican Republic, who were boosted by the decision of Leeds United defender Junior Firpo to switch his international allegiance from Spain earlier this year and by the goals of forward Dorny Romero. The latter scored in every Nations League game, with four goals in the last clash against Bermuda taking his total to ten – more than any other player in any league.

Saint Vincent & the Grenadines and Bermuda qualified for the Gold Cup prelims as the best runners-up across the four League B groups.

LEAGUE C

Belize had gone through their League C campaign without conceding – the only team with such a Nations League record – and so were full of confidence for their next challenge.

Each of the League C group winners, plus the best runners-up, took on sides relegated from League A for the chance to advance to the Gold Cup prelims. Belize were the only League C team to come through, defeating French Guiana 4-3 across two legs.

The other relegated teams from League A – Cuba, Guadeloupe and Guyana – all won their play-in games – against Saint Kitts & Nevis, Cayman Islands and Barbados respectively – while the third and fourth-place finishers from the two League A groups – Guatemala, Martinique, Nicaragua and Trinidad & Tobago – complete the prelims line-up.

The format of these tournaments and the qualification for them means the majority of CONCACAF nations still have something to play for in March.

There will now be a focus on the Nations League finals and the Gold Cup prelims, before CONCACAF'S festival of football, the Gold Cup, begins in the USA and Canada in June. It will run alongside the FIFA Club World Cup being played in the States at the same time. It's a busy time for these nations as the eyes of the football world are increasingly trained on their region ahead of 2026.

Results, final standings and Gold Cup qualifiers on page 91.

Nations League clash...Panama's Eduardo Guerrero and Costa Rica's Jeyland Mitchell fight for the ball

South America

TIM VICKERY

Ten-man Botafogo cling on to win first Libertadores

Brazilian club make amends for last season's domestic collapse by winning their maiden continental crown in dramatic fashion

Botafogo's 3-1 victory over fellow Brazilians Atletico Mineiro was a thoroughly predictable outcome in the final of the 2024 Copa Libertadores – which came about in a thoroughly unpredictable manner.

The expectation was that Botafogo would impose themselves on the game in Buenos Aires, their impressive front four coming at Atletico from all angles. Instead, they lost midfielder Gregore to a red card in the first minute after a wild challenge on Fausto Vera, and were forced to grind out a result based on a mere 20 per cent possession.

This should have suited Gabriel Milito's Atletico, a side built to enjoy having the ball. But if Botafogo were a man short, Atletico were woefully short on confidence, looking every inch a team going into the big day on a run of ten matches without a win. They were a desperate shadow of the team that beat River Plate 3-0 in the first leg of the semi-final. Painfully slow to move

Early bath...the challenge that saw Gregore sent off in the first minute

Champions... Botafogo players celebrate with the Libertadores trophy

the ball, Atletico looked extremely jaded – even though it was Botafogo who had played a crunch league game just four days earlier.

And they also imploded with some dreadful defending. Fighting from deep in a trench, Botafogo created one moment of danger in the first half – and found themselves two goals ahead.

First, when Botafogo attacked down the left, a loose ball into the box fell for Luiz Henrique to hook home a shot. The penalty-area was full of Atletico players, none of whom were defending effectively. And keeper Everson, a hero during the recent bad run, did not set himself well to make the save.

Things got worse for the goalkeeper. Five minutes later, with no apparent danger, a ball was headed back in his direction. Luiz Henrique did not give up the cause, and Everson unwisely hurtled out and clattered into him. Alex Telles drilled home the resultant penalty.

Atletico were clearly going to make changes at the interval. Veteran striker Hulk had been the only player to carry any semblance of threat, and his role was slightly altered as Milito brought on three substitutes and tweaked his formation. They now played with a front four, Chilean Eduardo Vargas joining Deyverson as a twin centre-forward, with Paulinho going wide on the left and Hulk on the right, from where he could find space to get service into the box.

There was an immediate response. Vargas headed home from a Hulk corner, and, finding some rhythm at last, Atletico turned the screw. What followed fell short of the quality of spectacle that many had been anticipating, but it was extraordinarily gripping as Botafogo held on, tackling and covering as the clock counted down towards their first Libertadores win.

Two more clear chances fell to Vargas. First, running on to a wonderful pass from substitute defender Mariano, he was slightly unlucky to fire just over. Then he latched on to a terrible back header from centre-back Adryelson, only to chip wastefully high.

> It was extraordinarily gripping as Botafogo held on, tackling and covering as the clock counted down towards their first Libertadores win

After playing the full 90 minutes a man down, extra-time would likely have been a bridge too far for Botafogo. So could they survive the inevitable late chance?

In the end it came in their favour – and it could not have fallen to a more appropriate player. Winger Junior Santos was the early season sensation. His power, pace and dainty footwork took them through the qualifying rounds of the Libertadores, scoring eight goals in four games. But in July he suffered a minor ankle break, and needed surgery. He was not seen again until November, by which time Botafogo had already booked their place in the final, and gradually picked up match rhythm with a few substitute appearances. Unleashed off the bench by Artur Jorge – yet another Portuguese coach to win the Libertadores – for the final 15 minutes, deep into stoppage-time he managed to fashion a move originally intended to hold possession near the corner flag into the clinching goal. After wriggling his way into the box, he bundled the ball in to seal the trophy.

The 2024 Botafogo team is full of new signings. It was fitting, then, that this title was sealed by a stalwart of last season, when they built up a huge lead in the league only to let it slip and finish fifth – hence requiring them to go through the qualifying rounds to make it into the Libertadores group phase. Junior Santos saw them through all that, and was there at the glorious end.

This was the sixth consecutive Brazilian Libertadores triumph, an unprecedented run of domination. Hope for the rest of the continent came instead from the Copa Sudamericana, where Racing of Argentina overcame three Brazilian teams in a row to claim the title. After seeing off Atletico Paranaense and Corinthians, Racing met Cruzeiro in the final in Asuncion, Paraguay, and raced into a 2-0 lead before sitting back to defend and, like the Libertadores decider, break out with a stoppage-time goal to win 3-1.

Decisive...Botafogo substitute Junior Santos scores the trophy-sealing goal at the Estadio Monumental

South Korea

JOHN DUERDEN

Three in a row for Ulsan

A change of name and of manager doesn't prevent club from completing a hat-trick of K-League titles

There was a familiar name at the top of the K-League as the 2024 season ended in November, but there was some surprise about the team that finished bottom to drop out of the top tier for the first time ever.

Ulsan HD may have rebranded, changing from Ulsan Hyundai Horangi ahead of this season, but the results have been similar. The southeasterners have lifted the title for a third successive time, becoming only the third Korean club (after Seongnam and Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors) to do so.

Title-winning boss...Kim Pan-gon arrived at Ulsan in July

It was a fairly smooth triumph, if you leave a controversial coaching change in July to one side. Korea legend Hong Myung-bo, who initially said that he wasn't interested in the national team job made vacant by Jurgen Klinsmann's sacking in February, angered the club's

Review

South Korean champions...Ulsan won their third title in a row

Debut season... Jesse Lingard joined FC Seoul in February

supporters by replacing the German. In came the experienced Kim Pan-gon, previously head coach of Hong Kong and Malaysia, to take over.

Only one player, veteran striker Joo Min-kyu, reached double figures for goals. Others chipped in, such as Swedish pair Gustav Ludwigson and Darijan Bojanic as well as Japanese midfielder Ataru Esaka and experienced locals Ko Seung-beom and Kim Min-woo. The defence was solid with national team goalkeeper Jo Hyeon-woo ever present and impressive behind veteran centre-back Kim Young-gwon.

While Ulsan had to wait until the penultimate game to clinch the title, there wasn't a huge amount of tension.

> It was a fairly smooth triumph, if you leave a controversial coaching change in July to one side

The usual challengers were absent. Record nine-time champions Jeonbuk spent the season fighting relegation, Pohang Steelers won the Korean FA Cup for the second year in a row – coming from behind to beat champions Ulsan 3-1 in the final after extra-time – but failed to impress in the league, while FC Seoul were never in the running despite the addition of former England international Jesse Lingard.

It left Gimcheon Sangmu and Gangwon FC to mount their first-ever title challenges and while these were impressive, it never really felt that they would go all the way.

Gangwon had never finished higher than sixth but, helped by Lee Sang-heon in attack and teenage winger Yang Min-hyuk, took second. Yang began the season as a semi-professional still in high school, yet ended with 12 goals and six assists and with a move to Tottenham Hotspur secured.

In third, Sangmu are Korea's army club, providing players with the chance to complete their 18-month military duty. Partly for that reason, which sees the squad change massively every few months as conscripts return to parent clubs and an inability to sign players, Gimcheon have always struggled. Under coach Chung Jung-yong, who has had success with Korea's youth teams, this season has been different. Taking the soldiers to third – though they won't be able to meet the AFC's requirements to enter the Champions League next year as they are not recognised as a fully professional club – is a fine achievement, especially as this is their first campaign back in the top flight after promotion. It has also been done with the league's lowest average attendance, around 3,000, unsurprising as the transient nature of the players (and no marketing or commercial officials) makes it hard to build local relations.

If that was a surprise, so was the relegation of Incheon United. The port club have flirted with the drop before, such as in 2020 when they won their last two games of the season to stay up, but the last two campaigns ended in fourth and fifth place. Cho Sung-hwan impressed as coach after taking over in 2020 but then looked to have run out of answers and, after a poor start, resigned in July. Replacement Choi Young-keun was unable to reverse the slide despite the presence of the league's top scorer: Montenegro striker Stefan Mugosa on 15 goals.

Nonetheless, at least they will be in good company in K-League 2 next season as they join local rivals Suwon Samsung Bluewings and Seongnam plus south port giants Busan IPark, with their combined totals of 15 K-League titles and five Asian Champions League crowns.

There were other underperformers at the bottom of the table as Daegu FC and the mighty Jeonbuk, who finished 11th and tenth respectively, went into the promotion-relegation play-offs against teams from the second tier.

Daegu took on Chungnam Asan, who finished second behind promoted FC Anyang, and suffered an almighty scare. After losing the first leg 4-3 away, Daegu led 2-0 in the return tie at home before conceding a 98th-minute penalty. That took the tie to extra-time, where Daegu eventually scored the decisive goal to register a 6-5 aggregate win and stay up by the skin of their teeth.

It was more straightforward for Jeonbuk, two-time Asian champions, who sealed a 4-2 aggregate win over Seoul E-Land, a club seeking their first-ever promotion to the top flight in only the tenth season in their history.

SEASON'S BEST

MANAGER OF THE SEASON
Chung Jung-yong (Gimcheon)
To take a team full of players doing their military duty to third after promotion last season was a very special achievement.

PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Jo Hyeon-woo (Ulsan)
The veteran goalkeeper kept 14 clean sheets to help Ulsan win a third-straight title and has also looked solid for the national team.

YOUNG PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Yang Min-hyuk (Gangwon)
The new Tottenham winger was so good in his debut season, with goals, assists and excitement, that he could have won the main prize.

Tottenham-bound... Yang Min-hyuk

Canada

DANNY LEWIS

Cavalry capture first Canadian crown

Calgary-based side win their first Canadian Premier League title after seeing off four-time champions Forge in the play-off final

Review

Champions... Cavalry lift the North Star Cup
Credit: Alamy

In the short history of the Canadian Premier League (CPL), the dominant club has undoubtedly been Forge FC and, when the play-off final of the 2024 edition kicked off on November 9, they were on the verge of an historic achievement.

While the Hammers had triumphed in four of the previous five CPL play-off finals, they had never done so after also topping the regular season. Indeed, no club has ever completed the league and play-off double. But, having pipped Cavalry to the regular season title by two points and seen their manager, Bobby Smyrniotis, named Coach of the Year for the first time, Forge appeared well placed to become the first.

Instead, the 2024 final saw Cavalry write an exciting new chapter in their history books.

As the play-offs began, a glance at the league table was enough to see that there was plenty of encouragement for Cavalry in their pursuit of a first Championship (or North Star Cup, as the trophy is dubbed). Forge had lost eight of their 28 league matches – twice as many as Cavalry – including both of their last two.

The way that the CPL's play-offs are structured means that the regular season's top two get two opportunities to reach the final. So, when Forge hosted Cavalry in the play-off's first semi-final in late October, the prize on offer was a place in the final,

Golden Boot winner...Tobias Warschewski

while the loser would play in the second semi-final against whoever emerged from the third, fourth and fifth-placed sides' encounters.

Cavalry set down their marker 27 minutes into the contest when Tobias Warschewski raced on to a ball behind Forge's defence. Displaying the clinical finishing that had taken him atop the scoring charts, the German striker coolly poked the ball past Jassem Koleilat and it into the net.

That goal was enough to ensure Cavalry went straight through to the final and, importantly, would host the final at Spruce Meadows.

Forge still had a chance to join them and they duly took it, with Kyle Bekker's corner delivery finding Malik Owolabi-Belewu in a crowded box for the defender to head in the only goal of the game against Atletico Ottawa.

That was a tough pill to swallow for Atletico, who had beaten Forge three out of four times in the regular season. Perhaps they were drained from the quarter-final clash with York United a few days earlier, which carried an air of tension after Atletico manager Carlos Gonzalez declared that his opponents were "the weakest team in the play-offs".

On the pitch, Ollie Bassett scored directly from a corner to put Ottawa 1-0 up shortly after half-time, but 16-year-old sensation Shola Jimoh struck back in stoppage-time. Another goal apiece followed in extra-time, including one by York's Molham Babouli, whose evening was then ruined as he took the only unsuccessful penalty of the shootout.

The Cavs and the Hammers meeting in the final for the second consecutive year brought up memories of their previous encounter, when sensational strikes from Beni Badibanga and Tristan Borges overturned Ali Musse's goal in extra-time.

The Cavs ensured that the script for this year's final, however, would be all about them with a memorable first-half performance. Their dominance was rewarded just after the half-hour mark, when Warschewski won a penalty from Dominic Samuel and emphatically scored it himself.

It was the striker's 14th goal of the season and seventh in six games – a particularly impressive achievement given that he missed the entirety of 2023 after being released by York United. A former Germany youth international who scored at the European Under-19 Championship in 2017, he joined Cavalry at the start of the year and by the end of it was celebrating a league winners' medal and Golden Boot.

Six minutes later, the goalscorer turned provider for Sergio Camargo, who had been with Cavalry since the very first CPL campaign, to coolly pick out the bottom corner.

The second half brought its tests for Cavalry. Seven minutes after the restart, Alexander Achinioti-Jonsson poked home a goal to get Forge back into the contest and there was a further blow six minutes later as Camargo went off injured.

But while Forge saw plenty of possession, they were up against a backline that had conceded just 27 goals in 28 regular season matches and included back-to-back CPL Defender of the Year Daan Klomp. A resolute defence didn't concede another shot on target for the rest of the game.

> "They've felt the pain, now they can taste the champagne"
> Cavalry boss Tommy Wheeldon Jr.

Rapturous celebrations rang out around ATCO Field when the final whistle was blown to confirm that Cavalry would lift the North Star Cup for the first time, becoming the CPL's third different club to win the play-offs.

The joy was even greater with this being their third final, and as coach Tommy Wheeldon Jr. said of his players: "They've felt the pain, now they can taste the champagne."

This latest achievement follows the club lifting the CPL Shield after topping the regular season last year. But, as Wheeldon admitted afterwards: "This is way more fun".

Championship-winning boss... Cavalry's Tommy Wheeldon Jr. *Credit: Cavalry FC*

Caribbean

STEVE MENARY

Review

Cavalier triumph in Caribbean Cup final

Jamaican Premier League champions defeat Cibao to be crowned Caribbean champions

A year after losing in the final of the inaugural CONCACAF Caribbean Cup, Cavalier went one better and edged out Cibao of the Dominican Republic on away goals to win the 2024 edition.

The competition is the successor to the Caribbean Club Championship, which ran from 1997 to 2022 before being revamped under CONCACAF's aegis in 2023. Then, Cavalier were comprehensively beaten 3-0 in the final by Suriname's Robinhood, but this time they came out on top.

The result sent Cavalier into the last 16 of the 2025 CONCACAF Champions Cup with Cibao handed a place in the first round as compensation, but the tournament proved a disappointment for the Dominican Republic, whose two representatives at the group stage had both qualified for the semi-finals.

In their semi-final with Haitian representatives Real Hope, Cibao were aided by playing both matches in the Dominican Republic due to the domestic strife currently gripping neighbouring Haiti.

CONCACAF Caribbean Cup final...Cibao (L) take on Cavalier (R) *Credit: CONCACAF.com*

In their "home" leg, Real Hope took on Cibao at the track and field stadium of PUCMM Catholic University in Santiago de los Caballeros and gave the Dominican side a real test.

After Jean Carlos Lopez put Cibao ahead after just four minutes, Angelo Exilus quickly levelled. Juan Diaz put Cibao back in front but Haitian international Exilus levelled again on 83 minutes, before Colombian striker Rivaldo Correa secured a 3-2 win with a stoppage-time penalty.

Eight days later at the Estadio Cibao, a solitary strike from Correa after just ten minutes was enough to settle the second leg and take the champions of the Liga Dominicana de Futbol into the final 4-2 on aggregate.

Moca, the Dominican Republic's other representatives in the competition, had placed third in the previous edition of the tournament in 2023 but fell short in their second attempt to make the final. After a goalless draw in the home leg of their semi-final against Cavalier, Moca were blown away in a bad tempered return at Mountain View.

Trinidad & Tobago international Kaile Auvray opened the scoring for Cavalier with a left-footed shot from distance after just a minute. Two goals from another of Cavalier's foreign contingent, Shaquille Stein from Suriname, and another from left-back Chris Ainsworth put the Jamaican club 4-0 up. A dire night for Moca got worse in first-half stoppage-time with keeper and captain Miguel Baez and midfielder Jesus Correa sent off.

Pascual Ramirez took over in goal but with three players on yellow cards Moca were in danger of not finishing the game if many more bookings were incurred and second-half strikes from Dwayne Atkinson, Auvray and Stein sealed a comprehensive 7-0 win for Cavalier.

After returning to the final in 2024, Cavalier hosted the first leg v Cibao at the National Stadium in Kingston. A goal from Stein settled matters with the striker slipping the ball past Miguel Lloyd as the Cibao goalkeeper failed to claim the ball after coming quickly off his line.

The result sent Cavalier into the last 16 of the 2025 CONCACAF Champions Cup

In the return leg in Santiago de los Caballeros, Diaz levelled the tie just before the half-hour mark and Correa then connected with a cross into the box from defender Ernesto Trinidad to head Cibao into a 2-1 lead overall.

The 22-year-old Atkinson crashed home a vital away goal on 54 minutes to put Cavalier into the driving seat, and the Jamaicans' goalkeeper Vino Barclett proved the game's crucial player as it entered the closing stages.

The Saint Lucia international tipped a long-range shot from Jose Barreto onto the crossbar. Substitute Orlando Russell nearly finished the tie off for Cavalier before Barclett denied winger Eddipo Rodriguez. Jalmaro Calvin hit a post for Cavalier at the death, but it didn't matter as they still progressed on away goals.

Moca had the opportunity to join Cibao in round one of the Champions Cup and even had home advantage of playing both legs of their third-place play-off against Real Hope in the Dominican Republic.

Cibao hosted the first leg, when a goal after eight minutes from Stanley Joseph was enough for Real Hope to prevail.

The return at the Estadio Complejo Deportivo Moca 86 on December 3 produced an absolute thriller.

After a goalless first half, Real Hope doubled their aggregate lead after Exilus converted on the counter-attack in the 66th minute. Two goals in eight minutes from winger Guillermo de Pena – one with each foot – put Moca ahead on the night but still behind on away goals.

The tie was in the balance, but Daniel Saint-Fleur equalised on the night in the 90th minute to put Real Hope ahead and Rapha Intervil shot home from inside the box to claim a 4-2 win.

The ten clubs to enter the group stage of the Caribbean Cup came from five countries, but three different islands will be represented in the Champions Cup – which kicks off in early February – providing wider interest in the region.

ABOVE: Hard-fought contest...Cavalry and Cibao players compete for an aerial duel *Credit: CONCACAF.com*
RIGHT: Caribbean champions...Jamaican outfit Cavalier celebrate with the trophy *Credit: CONCACAF.com*

Kuwait

JOHN DUERDEN

Arab nations ready for 26th Gulf Cup

Regional biennial competition, hosted this year in Kuwait, is likely to prove crucial amid World Cup qualifying campaign

The Arabian Gulf Cup means different things to different teams at different times but it's safe to say that the 26th edition, which runs from December 21 to the third day of 2025, is a bigger deal than the 25th.

Last time around, it was almost an afterthought as it kicked off just a few days after Lionel Messi had lifted the 2022 World Cup. Qatar and especially Saudi Arabia, who did not send a full-strength team, did not pay it as much attention as usual.

Iraq didn't mind, as they hosted the eight-team tournament for the first time since 1979 and then won for the first time since 1988.

The final in Basra was a thriller. Oman equalised in the tenth minute of added time. Iraq thought they had won it again after 116 minutes, but there was still time for Oman to level once more before Manaf Younis sent a stadium of 60,000 and a country of 45 million wild with a 122nd-minute winner for the Lions of Mesopotamia.

Similar excitement would be welcome in Kuwait this time, but it would be a surprise if the hosts end up triumphant; seven of the eight participants are in full readiness mode for crucial World Cup qualifiers in March and are set to treat this competition as vital preparation. Winning a regional trophy can be very nice but getting in shape for the four remaining games left on the road to North America is a bigger prize – not for nothing are the Saudi Pro League and other domestic tournaments being paused. With the expansion of qualification in Asia, even those that have been struggling along the road to North America – including Kuwait – will still have a chance when March comes along.

The World Cup battle also means familiarity. Group A sees Kuwait kick-off against Oman just two months on from a 4-0 defeat to the Reds, so home fans will be looking for some sort of revenge ahead of their return meeting in March.

Hosts...Kuwait's impressive Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium will host the final on January 3

Kuwait's Argentina-born coach Juan Antonio Pizzi, who represented Spain during his playing career, does have some experience in lifting international trophies, having led Chile to the 2016 Copa America. The Gulf Cup may not match the South American competition in terms of prestige, but a first trophy for Kuwait since 2010 – and there have been plenty of problems in the meantime, including a FIFA ban in 2015 that lasted for more than two years – would be an impressive achievement.

Oman have recovered from a poor start in World Cup qualifying and have shown that, while they are not at the upper levels of Asian football, they can beat the mid-ranking powers. Their other Group A opponents, though, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, are a level above that and are both still very much in the hunt for automatic World Cup qualification.

As Asian champions and three-time Gulf Cup winners, Qatar would love to stay in the winning habit. Akram Afif, crowned the 2023 AFC Player of the Year in November for his performances in the Asian Cup in January and February 2024, has shown signs of getting back into the groove with Almoez Ali. If those two continue to fire then the Maroons could go all the way.

Qatar's Spanish coach "Tintin" Marquez has the Asian Cup under his belt but UAE's Portuguese coach Paulo Bento wouldn't mind a first trophy since taking over in 2023. "We are aware of the rivalry that exists against Qatar," Bento said in November. Both of these teams will fancy their chances of getting out of the group – as one of the top two – and then going all the way.

> **Akram Afif has shown signs of getting back into the groove with Almoez Ali. If those two continue to fire then Qatar could go all the way**

In Group B, Saudi Arabia will especially welcome the tournament as Herve Renard

Preview

Holders...Iraq beat Oman on home soil in the last Arabian Gulf Cup final in January 2023

has had just two games since returning to replace Roberto Mancini in October. The Green Falcons have won the Gulf Cup three times but the last came in 2004. An opener against Bahrain, a World Cup qualifying rival, will add a little extra spice as it was October's 0-0 draw between the two in Jeddah that spelled the end for Mancini. Renard needs to find some goals from somewhere. Bahrain have reached the semi-finals in four of the last five tournaments, winning in 2019, and love nothing more than upsetting bigger neighbours.

Iraq will be looking to defend their crown. An opener with Yemen is not as easy as it may sound – they drew with Bahrain in June – but should provide the platform to get to the last four. Yemen, the only participants not in World Cup contention, would just love to win a first-ever game in this tournament. The other seven have bigger ambitions both on this regional stage and beyond.

Dangerous duo... Qatar's Akram Afif and Almoez Ali

THE DRAW

GROUP A

- Kuwait
- Oman
- Qatar
- United Arab Emirates

GROUP B

- Bahrain
- Iraq
- Saudi Arabia
- Yemen

Tonga

STEVE MENARY

The American Dream

Tonga's FA are embarking on a tour of the States in a bid to boost the game at all levels on the Pacific Island

ABOVE: OFC World Cup qualifiers...Tonga striker Viliami Tikoipau celebrates scoring v the Cook Islands *Credit: OFC Media via Phototek*

Thirty-four years after their last – and only – overseas tour, to Bergamo in Italy, the Pacific Island of Tonga is planning another foreign tour.

The Tonga Football Association is preparing for 2025 with a tour to California to give the senior squad game time and as part of a plan to widen the playing base by finding eligible players.

The plans are being driven by Kilifi Uele, the technical director at the Tonga FA and one of the island's greatest players.

Uele says: "Our collective vision is to showcase our talented young players, with a particular focus on those who could earn scholarships to colleges and universities in North America. Additionally, we aim to identify senior players who have the potential to play in USA Men's leagues."

The TFA will send three teams across different age groups and genders. An Under-19 Women's team is due to play in a tournament in Arizona in February as part of preparations for the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) U19 qualifiers the following month, with an U16 girl's side in the California Cup to prepare for the OFC Championship in August.

> "Through these games and our presence in the USA, we also hope to attract a number of players of Tongan heritage"
>
> Tonga FA technical director Kilifi Uele

Technical director... Tonga's Kilifi Uele (L) during his playing days

The TFA is working with Jeff Dyrek, the chief executive officer of Cal South, the California State Soccer Association, to take the senior squad to the state for matches with local clubs in June. This tour will also help the TFA search for eligible players in the Tongan diaspora, which is primarily located in Utah and California. "We believe that their presence will provide a robust support system for our teams during the tour," adds Uele.

Players from the Tongan diaspora were not part of the island's football squad during the career of Uele, who played domestically for Veitongo and was part of the Tongan squad that won silver at the 1994 Polynesian Games.

Tonga's most capped player with 26 appearances and three goals, Uele took on the technical director role in 2005 but carried on playing at international level for another 12 years, finally retiring in 2017 after scoring against New Caledonia.

Tonga's appearances at senior level have been sporadic and the island dropped off FIFA's rankings recently due to not playing enough games to qualify, but the TFA is now making efforts to widen the playing base at all levels to support more regular participation.

Some other players have been identified such as Mohammed Rajani, a Sydney-born winger with a Tongan mother, who has represented the island at junior and senior level.

More recently, a call for players on Facebook attracted Maikeli Lomu, born and raised in Utah with a Tongan father, who won a soccer scholarship in the United States. A handful of others have already been recruited from Fiji and New Zealand.

Although Tonga lost in the final of the OFC World Cup qualifiers, edged out in extra-time 2-1 by Samoa in September, Uele hopes the tours will help move the game forward on the island.

"Through these games and our presence in the USA, we also hope to attract a number of players of Tongan heritage who are interested in representing Tonga on the international stage in the future," says Uele. "This includes attracting future prospects of every age group, providing opportunities for both young talents and senior players."

Tales from the 211

Exploring the weird and wonderful world of football across FIFA's 211 member nations

Historic achievement ...San Marino

SAN MARINO MAKE HISTORY WITH UNLIKELY UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE PROMOTION

San Marino scored goals in their narrow defeats to Denmark, Kazakhstan and Finland at the tail end of 2023 – the first time they had ever netted in three consecutive matches. But when their charismatic coach Fabrizio Costantini left last December and their top two goalkeepers quit on consecutive days in February, the prospects that the micro-state would ever end their world-record winless run – 140 games over a 20-year period – looked very bleak indeed.

But the Sammarinese defied the odds and beat Liechtenstein 1-0 in September thanks to a strike by 19-year-old Nicko Sensoli. After then drawing 1-1 with Gibraltar in their penultimate UEFA Nations League D match in November thanks to a stoppage-time penalty by Nicola Nanni, they went into the return fixture against Liechtenstein three days later knowing that victory would seal an historic promotion to League C. The world's lowest-ranked nation initially fell behind but scored three second-half goals through Lorenzo Lazzari, another Nanni penalty and Alessandro Golinucci to record their first-ever away win and achieve the unthinkable.

The triumph was feverishly celebrated by the *Brigata Mai 1 Gioia* ("Never Any Joy Brigade"), a friendly ultra group that was initially set up solely for the purpose of watching San Marino lose but is now facing an identity crisis following a period of unprecedented success. The *Titani's* status as heroic winless underdogs has also seen them attract support from further afield, with fans travelling from as far as Peru and Saudi Arabia to watch their game in Vaduz. Now that they are a winning outfit, it remains to be seen whether their appeal will endure.

SWISS YOUNGSTER RETIRES FOR RELIGIOUS REASONS

The early retirement of injury-free footballers is not a new phenomenon – Brazil's Mario de Castro, a prolific Brazilian striker for Atletico Mineiro in the 1920s with 195 goals in 100 games, retired aged 26 to become a doctor, while Eric Cantona quit at 30 to pursue an acting career – but it is still rare enough to raise eyebrows. That was certainly the case in November when Swiss defender Silvan Wallner, who was playing for Blau-Weiss Linz in Austria and had ten youth caps for Switzerland under his belt, announced the end of his playing career for religious reasons aged 22.

According to media reports, Wallner is a Seventh-Day Adventist – a denomination of the Christian faith that is characterised by its observance of Saturday, the seventh day of the week in the Christian and the Hebrew calendar, as the Sabbath. With many fixtures in the Austrian Bundesliga – and indeed, in many other countries around the world – taking place on Saturdays, Wallner felt compelled to hang up his boots and put his faith first.

He is by no means the first footballer to retire for religious reasons. Former Argentina goalkeeper Carlos Roa – also a Seventh-Day Adventist – was so convinced the world would end upon the arrival of the new Millennium that he quit his club Real Mallorca in 1999 and withdrew to a ranch in his homeland to preach while waiting for the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse to arrive. He did eventually return to Real Mallorca when the world didn't end, but only on the proviso he didn't have to play on Saturdays.

FRENCH TEAM SET GLOBAL AWAY-DAY RECORD FOR 2024

The Coupe de France differs from most other domestic cup competitions around the world in that it incorporates clubs from overseas territories – from Saint Pierre & Miquelon off the coast of Canada to New Caledonia in the South Pacific. In the majority of cases, the overseas teams travel to the mainland to contest their fixtures – but clubs based in France can also volunteer to make the long journey to the former colonies themselves.

One such club is fourth-tier US Avranches, who were drawn away to Tahitian Cup winners AS Dragon in the seventh round. After making the mammoth trip across 11 time zones, they succumbed to a 4-3 penalty-shootout defeat following a 2-2 draw. It was a somewhat shock result given that overseas clubs tend to struggle against mainland opposition – Tahiti's AS Pirae lost to a sixth-tier side last year, and Avranches won 9-0 when they met Dragon in the same competition on the mainland back in 2016.

The round-trip of 32,000km that Avranches made is the biggest distance travelled by any club in world football for an away fixture in 2024. The representatives from New Caledonia, which is the furthest overseas territory from Paris, usually sets the record for world football's biggest away day each year. But with political unrest ongoing since May and domestic football suspended, there is no participant from the territory in the competition this season.

Lee Wingate

Coupe de France...US Avranches (R) in action in 2023

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LIGUE 1 2024-25

ANGERS

GOALKEEPERS
16 Melvin **ZINGA** (Cgo) (22) 16.03.02
30 Yahia **FOFANA** (Civ) (24) 21.08.00
40 Oumar **PONA** (18) 21.06.06

DEFENDERS
2 Carlens **ARCUS** (Hai) (28) 28.06.96
3 Jacques **EKOMIE** (Gab) (21) 19.08.03
21 Jordan **LEFORT** (31) 09.08.93
22 Cedric **HOUNTONDJI** (Ben) (30) 19.01.94
24 Emmanuel **BIUMLA** (19) 08.05.05
25 Abdoulaye **BAMBA** (Civ) (34) 25.04.90
26 Florent **HANIN** (34) 04.02.90
27 Lilian **RAOLISOA** (24) 16.06.00
29 Ousmane **CAMARA** (21) 06.03.03

MIDFIELDERS
6 Jean-Eudes **AHOLOU** (Civ) (34) 20.03.90
8 Joseph **LOPY** (Sen) (32) 15.03.92
10 Himad **ABDELLI** (Alg) (25) 17.11.99
12 Zinedine **OULD KHALED** (24) 14.01.00
14 Yassin **BELKHDIM** (Mar) (22) 14.02.02
15 Pierrick **CAPELLE** (37) 15.03.87
93 Haris **BELKEBLA** (Alg) (30) 28.01.94

FORWARDS
7 Ibrahima **NIANE** (Sen) (25) 11.03.99
9 Lois **DIONY** (32) 20.12.92
11 Sidiki **CHERIF** (18) 15.12.06
17 Justin Noel **KALUMBA** (19) 25.12.04
18 Jim **ALLEVINAH** (Gab) (29) 27.02.95
19 Esteban **LEPAUL** (24) 18.04.00
20 Zinedine **FERHAT** (Alg) (31) 01.03.93
23 Adrien **HUNOU** (30) 19.01.94
28 Farid **EL MELALI** (Alg) (27) 12.07.97
99 Bamba **DIENG** (Sen) (24) 23.03.00

COACH
Alexandre **DUJEUX** (48) 08.01.76

AUXERRE

GOALKEEPERS
16 Donovan **LEON** (Guy) (32) 03.11.92
30 Tom **NEGREL** (21) 13.04.03
37 Raphael **ADICEAM** (34) 03.07.90
40 Theo **DE PERCIN** (23) 02.02.01

DEFENDERS
3 Gabriel **OSHO** (Nga) (26) 14.08.98
4 **JUBAL** (Bra) (31) 29.08.93
5 Theo **PELLENARD** (30) 04.03.94
6 Saad **AGOUZOUL** (Mar) (27) 10.08.97
14 Gideon **MENSAH** (Gha) (26) 18.07.98
20 Sinaly **DIOMANDE** (Civ) (23) 09.04.01
23 Ki-Jana **HOEVER** (Ned) (22) 18.01.02
24 Ange Loic **N'GATTA** (21) 11.12.03
26 Paul **JOLY** (24) 07.07.00
92 Clement **AKPA** (Civ) (23) 24.11.01

MIDFIELDERS
8 Nathan **BUAYI-KIALA** (20) 29.02.04
18 Assane **DIOUSSE** (Sen) (27) 20.09.97
21 Lasso **COULIBALY** (Civ) (22) 19.10.02
25 Hamed **TRAORE** (Civ) (24) 16.02.00
27 Kevin **DANOIS** (20) 28.06.04
29 Ben **VIADERE** (19) 02.09.05
42 Elisha **OWUSU** (Gha) (27) 07.11.97
97 Rayan **RAVELOSON** (Mad) (27) 16.01.97

FORWARDS
9 Theo **BAIR** (Can) (25) 27.08.99
10 Gaetan **PERRIN** (28) 07.06.96
11 Eros **MADDY** (Ned) (23) 05.02.01
17 Lassine **SINAYOKO** (Mli) (25) 08.12.99
19 Florian **AYE** (27) 19.01.97
45 Ado **ONAIWU** (Jpn) (29) 08.11.95

COACH
Christophe **PELISSIER** (59) 05.10.65

BREST

GOALKEEPERS
30 Gregoire **COUDERT** (25) 03.04.99
40 Marco **BIZOT** (Ned) (33) 10.03.91
50 Noah **JAUNY** (Irl) (20) 26.08.04

DEFENDERS
2 Bradley **LOCKO** (22) 06.05.02
3 Abdoulaye **NDIAYE** (Sen) (22) 10.04.02
5 Brendan **CHARDONNET** (29) 22.12.94
7 Kenny **LALA** (33) 03.10.91
12 Luck **ZOGBE** (Civ) (19) 24.03.05
22 Massadio **HAIDARA** (Mli) (32) 02.12.92
23 Jordan **AMAVI** (30) 09.03.94
25 Julien **LE CARDINAL** (27) 03.08.97
44 Soumaila **COULIBALY** (21) 14.10.03

MIDFIELDERS
6 Edimilson **FERNANDES** (Sui) (28) 15.04.96
8 Hugo **MAGNETTI** (26) 30.05.98
9 Kamory **DOUMBIA** (Mli) (21) 18.02.03
20 Pierre **LEES-MELOU** (31) 25.05.93
21 Romain **FAIVRE** (26) 14.07.98
28 Jonas **MARTIN** (34) 09.04.90
45 Mahdi **CAMARA** (26) 30.06.98

FORWARDS
10 Romain **DEL CASTILLO** (28) 29.03.96
11 Axel **CAMBLAN** (21) 30.08.03
14 Mama **BALDE** (Gnb) (29) 06.11.95
17 Abdallah **SIMA** (Sen) (23) 17.06.01
19 Ludovic **AJORQUE** (30) 25.02.94
26 Mathias **PEREIRA LAGE** (28) 30.11.96
34 Ibrahim **SALAH** (Mar) (23) 30.08.01

COACH
Eric **ROY** (57) 26.09.67

LE HAVRE

GOALKEEPERS
1 Mathieu **GORGELIN** (34) 05.08.90
30 Arthur **DESMAS** (30) 07.04.94
50 Paul **ARGNEY** (18) 23.05.06

DEFENDERS
4 Gautier **LLORIS** (29) 18.07.95
6 Etienne **YOUTE** (22) 14.01.02
7 Loic **NEGO** (Hun) (33) 15.01.91
12 Matheo **BODMER** (20) 06.05.04
17 Oualid **EL HAJJAM** (Mar) (33) 19.02.91
18 Yanis **ZOUAOUI** (26) 28.04.98
22 Yoann **SALMIER** (Guf) (32) 21.11.92
27 Christopher **OPERI** (Civ) (27) 29.04.97
32 Timothee **PEMBELE** (22) 09.09.02
93 Arouna **SANGATE** (Sen) (22) 12.04.02

MIDFIELDERS
5 Oussama **TARGHALLINE** (Mar) (22) 20.05.02
8 Yassine **KECHTA** (Mar) (22) 25.02.02
14 Daler **KUZYAEV** (Rus) (31) 15.01.93
19 Rassoul **NDIAYE** (Sen) (23) 11.12.01
24 Guy Noel **ZOHOURI** (17) 01.02.07
25 Alois **CONFAIS** (28) 07.09.96
44 Ismail **BOUNEB** (18) 07.07.06
78 Daren **MOSENGO** (18) 11.08.06
94 Abdoulaye **TOURE** (Gui) (30) 03.03.94

FORWARDS
9 Yann **KITALA** (Cod) (26) 09.04.98
10 Josue **CASIMIR** (Glp) (23) 24.09.01
11 Emmanuel **SABBI** (USA) (26) 24.12.97
13 Steve **NGOURA** (19) 22.02.05
20 Elysee **LOGBO** (20) 06.05.04
21 Antoine **JOUJOU** (21) 12.03.03
28 Andre **AYEW** (Gha) (35) 17.12.89
29 Samuel **GRANDSIR** (28) 13.08.96
45 Issa **SOUMARE** (Sen) (24) 10.10.00
46 Ilyes **HOUSNI** (Mar) (19) 14.05.05
70 Ruben **LONDJA** (Sui) (18) 10.06.06

COACH
Didier **DIGARD** (38) 12.07.86

LENS

GOALKEEPERS
1 Denis **PETRIC** (Svn) (36) 24.05.88
16 Herve **KOFFI** (Bfa) (28) 16.10.96
30 Brice **SAMBA** (30) 24.04.94

DEFENDERS
2 Ruben **AGUILAR** (31) 36.04.93
3 Deiver **MACHADO** (Col) (31) 02.09.93
4 Kevin **DANSO** (Aut) (26) 19.09.88
13 Jhoanner **CHAVEZ** (Ecu) (22) 25.04.02
14 Facundo **MEDINA** (Arg) (25) 28.05.99
20 Malang **SARR** (25) 23.01.99
24 Jonathan **GRADIT** (32) 24.11.92
25 Abdukodir **KHUSANOV** (Uzb) (20) 29.02.04
27 Sidi **BANE** (Sen) (20) 14.01.04
37 Ismaelo **GANIOU** (19) 14.03.05

MIDFIELDERS
10 David **DA COSTA** (Por) (23) 05.01.01
11 Angelo **FULGINI** (28) 20.08.96
15 Hamzat **OJEDIRAN** (Nga) (21) 14.11.03
18 Andy **DIOUF** (21) 17.05.03
19 Jimmy **CABOT** (30) 18.04.94
21 Anass **ZAROURY** (Mar) (24) 07.11.00
23 Neil **EL AYNAOUI** (Mar) (23) 02.07.01
26 Nampalys **MENDY** (Sen) (32) 23.06.92
28 Adrien **THOMASSON** (31) 10.12.93
29 Przemyslaw **FRANKOWSKI** (Pol) (29) 12.04.95
34 Tom **POUILLY** (21) 18.06.03

FORWARDS
7 Florian **SOTOCA** (34) 25.10.90
8 M'Bala **NZOLA** (Ang) (28) 18.08.96
9 Martin **SATRIANO** (Uru) (23) 20.02.01
22 Wesley **SAID** (29) 19.04.95
36 Remy **LABEAU** (Glp) (21) 03.03.03

COACH
Will **STILL** (Bel) (32) 14.10.92

LILLE

GOALKEEPERS
1 Vito **MANNONE** (Ita) (36) 02.03.88
16 Marc-Aurele **CAILLARD** (30) 12.03.94
30 Lucas **CHEVALIER** (23) 06.11.01

DEFENDERS
2 Aissa **MANDI** (Alg) (33) 22.10.91
4 **ALEXSANDRO** (Bra) (25) 09.08.99
5 Gabriel **GUDMUNDSSON** (Swe) (25) 29.04.99
12 Thomas **MEUNIER** (Bel) (33) 12.09.91
13 Akim **ZEDADKA** (Alg) (29) 30.05.95
14 Samuel **UMTITI** (31) 14.11.93
18 Bafode **DIAKATE** (23) 06.01.01
20 Mitchel **BAKKER** (Ned) (24) 20.06.00
22 Tiago **SANTOS** (Por) (22) 23.07.02
28 Rafael **FERNANDES** (Por) (22) 28.06.02
31 **ISMAILY** (Bra) (34) 11.01.90

MIDFIELDERS
6 Nabil **BENTALEB** (Alg) (30) 24.11.94
8 Angel **GOMES** (Eng) (24) 31.08.00
10 Remy **CABELLA** (34) 08.03.90
17 Ngal'ayel **MUKAU** (Cod) (20) 03.11.04
21 Benjamin **ANDRE** (34) 03.08.90
26 Andre **GOMES** (Por) (31) 30.07.93
29 Ethan **MBAPPE** (17) 29.12.06
32 Ayyoub **BOUADDI** (17) 02.10.07

FORWARDS
7 Hakon Arnar **HARALDSSON** (Isl) (21) 10.04.03
9 Jonathan **DAVID** (Can) (24) 14.01.00
11 Osame **SAHRAOUI** (Mar) (23) 11.06.01
19 Matias **FERNANDEZ-PARDO** (Bel) (19) 03.02.05
23 Edon **ZHEGROVA** (Kos) (25) 31.03.99
27 Mohammed **BAYO** (Gui) (26) 04.06.98

COACH
Bruno **GENESIO** (58) 01.09.66

LYON

GOALKEEPERS
1 Anthony **LOPES** (Por) (34) 25.06.96
23 Lucas **PERRI** (Bra) (27) 10.12.97
30 Justin **BENGUI** (19) 09.07.05
40 Remy **DESCAMPS** (28) 25.06.96

DEFENDERS
3 Nicolas **TAGLIAFICO** (Arg) (32) 31.08.92
16 **ABNER** (Bra) (24) 27.05.00
19 Moussa **NIAKHATE** (Sen) (28) 08.03.96
20 Sael **KUMBEDI** (19) 26.03.05
22 Clinton **MATA** (Ang) (32) 07.11.92
27 Warmed **OMARI** (Com) (24) 23.04.00
55 Duje **CALETA-CAR** (Cro) (28) 17.09.96

MIDFIELDERS
4 Paul **AKOUOKOU** (Civ) (27) 20.12.97
6 Maxence **CAQUERET** (24) 15.02.00
7 Jordan **VERETOUT** (31) 01.03.93
8 Corentin **TOLISSO** (30) 03.08.94
15 Tanner **TESSMANN** (USA) (23) 24.09.01
31 Nemanja **MATIC** (Srb) (36) 01.08.88
34 Mahamadou **DIAWARA** (19) 17.02.05
98 Ainsley **MAITLAND-NILES** (Eng) (27) 29.08.97

FORWARDS
9 Gift **ORBAN** (Nga) (22) 17.07.02
10 Alexandre **LACAZETTE** (33) 28.05.91
11 Malick **FOFANA** (Bel) (19) 31.03.05
12 Wilfried **ZAHA** (Civ) (32) 10.11.92
17 Said **BENRAHMA** (Alg) (29) 10.08.95
18 Rayan **CHERKI** (21) 17.08.03
37 Ernest **NUAMAH** (Gha) (21) 01.11.03
69 Georges **MIKAUTADZE** (Geo) (24) 31.10.00

COACH
Pierre **SAGE** (45) 05.05.79

Lyon joy...team-mates celebrate with skipper Alexandre Lacazette

MARSEILLE

GOALKEEPERS
1 Geronimo **RULLI** (Arg) (32) 20.05.92
12 Jeffrey **DE LANGE** (Ned) (26) 01.04.98
36 Ruben **BLANCO** (Spa) (29) 25.07.95

DEFENDERS
3 Quentin **MERLIN** (22) 16.05.02
5 Leonardo **BALERDI** (Arg) (25) 26.01.99
6 Ulisses **GARCIA** (Sui) (28) 11.01.96
13 Derek **CORNELIUS** (Can) (17) 25.11.97
18 Bamo **MEITE** (Civ) (23) 03.12.01
20 Lilian **BRASSIER** (25) 02.11.99
29 Pol **LIROLA** (Spa) (27) 13.08.97
62 Michael **MURILLO** (Pan) (28) 11.02.96
99 Chancel **MBEMBA** (Cod) (30) 08.08.94

MIDFIELDERS
7 Valentin **CARBONI** (Arg) (19) 05.05.05
11 Amine **HARIT** (Mar) (27) 18.06.97
19 Geoffrey **KONDOGBIA** (Cta) (31) 15.02.93
21 Valentin **RONGIER** (30) 07.12.94
23 Pierre-Emile **HOJBJERG** (Den) (29) 05.08.95
25 Adrien **RABIOT** (29) 03.04.95
26 Bilal **NADIR** (Mar) (21) 28.11.03
47 Gael **LAFONT** (18) 07.06.06
50 Darryl **BAKOLA** (17) 30.11.07
51 Ismael **KONE** (Can) (22) 16.06.02

FORWARDS
8 Neal **MAUPAY** (28) 14.08.96
9 Elye **WAHI** (21) 02.01.03
10 Mason **GREENWOOD** (Eng) (23) 01.10.01
14 Faris **MOUMBAGNA** (Cmr) (24) 01.07.00
17 Jonathan **ROWE** (Eng) (21) 30.04.03
22 Enzo **STERNAL** (17) 28.05.07
24 Francois **MUGHE** (Cmr) (20) 16.06.04
44 Luis **HENRIQUE** (Bra) (23) 14.12.01
48 Keyliane **ABDALLAH** (18) 05.04.06

COACH
Roberto **DE ZERBI** (Ita) (45) 06.06.79

MONACO

GOALKEEPERS
1 Radoslaw **MAJECKI** (Pol) (25) 16.11.99
16 Philipp **KOHN** (Sui) (26) 02.04.98
50 Yann **LIENARD** (21) 16.03.03

DEFENDERS
2 **VANDERSON** (Bra) (23) 21.06.01
4 Jordan **TEZE** (Ned) (25) 30.09.99
5 Thilo **KEHRER** (Ger) (28) 21.09.96
12 Caio **HENRIQUE** (Bra) (27) 31.07.97
13 Christian **MAWISSA** (19) 18.04.05
17 Wilfried **SINGO** (Civ) (23) 25.12.00
20 Kassoum **OUATTARA** (20) 14.10.04
22 Mohammed **SALISU** (Gha) (25) 17.04.99

MIDFIELDERS
6 Denis **ZAKARIA** (Sui) (28) 20.11.96
8 Eliot **MATAZO** (Bel) (22) 15.02.02
10 Aleksandr **GOLOVIN** (Rus) (28) 30.05.96
15 Lamine **CAMARA** (Sen) (20) 01.01.04
37 Edan **DIOP** (20) 28.08.04
88 Soungoutou **MAGASSA** (21) 08.10.03

FORWARDS
7 Eliesse **BEN SEGHIR** (Mar) (19) 16.02.05
9 Folarin **BALOGUN** (USA) (23) 03.07.01
11 Maghnes **AKLIOUCHE** (22) 25.02.02
18 Takumi **MINAMINO** (Jpn) (29) 16.01.95
21 George **ILENIKHENA** (Nga) (18) 16.08.06
27 Krepin **DIATTA** (Sen) (25) 25.02.99
36 Breel **EMBOLO** (Sui) (27) 14.02.97

COACH
Adi **HUTTER** (Aut) (54) 11.02.70

MONTPELLIER

GOALKEEPERS
1 Belmin **DIZDAREVIC** (Bih) (23) 09.08.01
16 Dimitry **BERTAUD** (Cod) (26) 06.06.98
40 Benjamin **LECOMTE** (33) 26.04.91

DEFENDERS
3 Issiaga **SYLLA** (Gui) (30) 01.01.94
4 Kiki **KOUYATE** (Mli) (27) 15.03.97
5 Modibo **SAGNAN** (Mli) (25) 14.04.99
6 Christopher **JULIEN** (31) 22.03.93
17 Theo **SAINTE-LUCE** (26) 20.10.98
21 Lucas **MINCARELLI** (20) 05.01.04
27 Becir **OMERAGIC** (Sui) (22) 20.01.02
29 Enzo **TCHATO** (Cmr) (22) 23.11.02
52 Nikola **MAKSIMOVIC** (Srb) (33) 25.11.91
77 Falaye **SACKO** (Mli) (29) 01.05.95

MIDFIELDERS
11 Teji **SAVANIER** (32) 22.12.91
12 Jordan **FERRI** (32) 12.03.92
13 Joris **CHOTARD** (23) 24.09.01
15 Gabriel **BARES** (Sui) (24) 29.08.00
19 Rabby **NZINGOULA** (19) 25.11.05
20 Birama **TOURE** (Mli) (32) 06.06.92
22 Kahlil **FAYAD** (20) 09.06.04

FORWARDS
7 Arnaud **NORDIN** (26) 17.06.98
8 Akor **ADAMS** (Nga) (24) 29.01.00
9 Mousa **AL TAMARI** (Jor) (27) 10.06.97
10 Wahbi **KHAZRI** (Tun) (33) 08.02.91
14 Othmane **MAAMMA** (Mar) (19) 06.10.05
28 Glenn **NGOSSO** (Cmr) (20) 12.01.04
70 Tanguy **COULIBALY** (23) 18.02.01

COACH
Jean-Louis **GASSET** (71) 09.12.53

Montpellier captain...*La Paillade's* mercurial midfielder Teji Savanier

NANTES

GOALKEEPERS
1 Alban **LAFONT** (25) 23.01.99
30 Patrik **CARLGREN** (Swe) (32) 08.01.92
50 Hugo **BARBET** (23) 22.11.01

DEFENDERS
2 Jean Kevin **DUVERNE** (Hai) (27) 12.07.97
3 Nicolas **COZZA** (25) 08.01.99
4 Nicolas **PALLOIS** (37) 19.09.87
11 Marcus **COCO** (Glp) (28) 24.06.96
21 Jean-Charles **CASTELLETTO** (Cmr) (29) 16.01.95
28 Fabien **CENTONZE** (28) 16.01.96
44 Nathan **ZEZE** (19) 19.06.05
98 Kelvin **AMIAN** (26) 08.02.98

MIDFIELDERS
5 Pedro **CHIRIVELLA** (Spa) (27) 23.05.97
6 Douglas **AUGUSTO** (Bra) (27) 13.01.97
8 Johann **LEPENANT** (22) 22.10.02
17 Jean-Philippe **GBAMIN** (Civ) (29) 25.09.95
22 Sorba **THOMAS** (Wal) (25) 25.01.99
25 Florent **MOLLET** (33) 19.11.91
59 Dehmaine **ASSOUMANI** (19) 17.04.05

FORWARDS
7 Ignatius **GANAGO** (Cmr) (25) 16.02.99
10 Tino **KADEWERE** (Zim) (28) 05.01.96
27 Moses **SIMON** (Nga) (29) 12.06.95
31 Mostafa **MOHAMED** (Egy) (27) 28.11.97
39 Matthis **ABLINE** (21) 28.03.03
62 Herba **GUIRASSY** (18) 29.08.06

COACH
Antoine **KOMBOUARE** (61) 16.11.63

NICE

GOALKEEPERS
1 Marcin **BULKA** (Pol) (25) 04.10.99
31 Maxime **DUPE** (31) 04.03.93
77 Teddy **BOULHENDI** (Alg) (23) 09.04.01

DEFENDERS
2 Ali **ABDI** (Tun) (31) 20.12.93
4 **DANTE** (Bra) (41) 18.10.83
5 Mohamed **ABDELMONEM** (Egy) (25) 01.02.99
20 Tom **LOUCHET** (21) 04.05.03
26 Melvin **BARD** (24) 06.11.00
33 Antoine **MENDY** (20) 27.05.04
44 Amidou **DOUMBOUYA** (17) 05.08.07
64 Moise **BOMBITO** (Can) (24) 30.03.00
92 Jonathan **CLAUSS** (32) 25.09.92

MIDFIELDERS
6 Hicham **BOUDAOUI** (Alg) (25) 23.09.99
8 Pablo **ROSARIO** (Ned) (27) 07.01.97
11 Morgan **SANSON** (30) 18.08.94
18 Rares **ILIE** (Bel) (21) 19.04.03
22 Tanguy **NDOMBELE** (27) 28.12.96
55 Youssouf **NDAYISHIMIYE** (Bdi) (26) 27.10.98

FORWARDS
7 Jeremie **BOGA** (Civ) (27) 03.01.97
9 Terem **MOFFI** (Nga) (25) 25.05.99
10 Sofiane **DIOP** (Mar) (24) 09.06.00
15 Youssoufa **MOUKOKO** (Ger) (20) 20.11.04
19 Badredine **BOUANANI** (Alg) (20) 08.12.04
24 Gaetan **LABORDE** (30) 03.05.94
25 Mohamed-Ali **CHO** (20) 19.01.04
29 Evann **GUESSAND** (Civ) (23) 01.07.01
45 Victor **ORAKPO** (Nga) (18) 14.01.06

COACH
Franck **HAISE** (53) 15.04.71

PSG

GOALKEEPERS
1 Gianluigi **DONNARUMMA** (Ita) (25) 25.02.99
39 Matvey **SAFONOV** (Rus) (25) 25.02.99
80 Arnau **TENAS** (Spa) (23) 30.05.01

DEFENDERS
2 Achraf **HAKIMI** (Mar) (26) 04.11.98
3 Presnel **KIMPEMBE** (29) 13.08.95
5 **MARQUINHOS** (Bra) (30) 14.05.94
21 Lucas **HERNANDEZ** (28) 14.02.96
25 Nuno **MENDES** (Por) (22) 19.06.02
35 Lucas **BERALDO** (Bra) (24) 24.11.03
37 Milan **SKRINIAR** (Svk) (29) 11.02.95
42 Yoram **ZAGUE** (18) 15.05.06
51 Willian **PACHO** (Ecu) (23) 16.10.01

MIDFIELDERS
8 **FABIAN** Ruiz (Spa) (28) 03.03.96
17 **VITINHA** (Por) (24) 13.02.00
19 **LEE** Kang-In (Kor) (23) 19.02.01
24 Senny **MAYULU** (18) 17.05.06
33 Warren **ZAIRE-EMERY** (18) 08.03.06
87 Joao **NEVES** (Por) (20) 27.09.04

FORWARDS
9 Goncalo **RAMOS** (Por) (23) 20.06.01
10 Ousmane **DEMBELE** (27) 15.04.97
11 Marco **ASENSIO** (Spa) (28) 21.01.96
14 Desire **DOUE** (19) 03.06.05
23 Randal **KOLO MUANI** (26) 05.12.98
29 Bradley **BARCOLA** (22) 02.09.02
49 Ibrahim **MBAYE** (16) 24.01.08

COACH
Luis **ENRIQUE** (Spa) (54) 08.05.70

REIMS

GOALKEEPERS
16 Ludovic **BUTELLE** (41) 03.04.83
20 Alexandre **OLLIERO** (28) 15.02.96
94 Yehvann **DIOUF** (25) 16.11.99

DEFENDERS
2 Joseph **OKUMU** (Ken) (27) 26.05.97
4 Maxime **BUSI** (Bel) (25) 14.10.99
5 Emmanuel **AGBADOU** (Civ) (27) 17.06.97
18 Sergio **AKIEME** (Spa) (27) 16.12.97
21 Cedric **KIPRE** (Civ) (28) 09.12.96
23 Aurelio **BUTA** (Por) (27) 10.02.97
25 Thibault **DE SMET** (Bel) (26) 05.06.98
55 Nhoa **SANGUI** (18) 27.02.06
92 Abdoul **KONE** (19) 22.04.05

MIDFIELDERS
6 Valentin **ATANGANA** (19) 25.08.05
10 Teddy **TEUMA** (Mlt) (31) 30.09.93
14 Reda **KHADRA** (Ger) (23) 04.07.01
15 Marshall **MUNETSI** (Zim) (28) 22.06.96
19 Gabriel **MOSCARDO** (Bra) (19) 28.09.05
71 Yaya **FOFANA** (Civ) (20) 12.06.04
72 Amadou **KONE** (Civ) (19) 14.05.05

FORWARDS
7 Junya **ITO** (Jpn) (31) 09.03.93
9 Mohamed **DARAMY** (Den) (22) 07.01.02
11 Amine **SALAMA** (24) 18.07.00
17 Keito **NAKAMURA** (Jpn) (24) 28.07.00
22 Oumar **DIAKITE** (Civ) (21) 20.12.03
67 Mamadou **DIAKHON** (19) 22.09.05

COACH
Luka **ELSNER** (Svn) (42) 02.08.82

RENNES

GOALKEEPERS
23 Gauthier **GALLON** (31) 23.04.93
30 Steve **MANDANDA** (39) 28.03.85
40 Geoffrey **LEMBET** (Cta) (36) 23.09.88
80 Dogan **ALEMDAR** (Tur) (22) 29.10.02

DEFENDERS
3 Adrien **TRUFFERT** (23) 20.11.01
4 Christopher **WOOH** (Cmr) (23) 18.09.01
15 Mikayil **FAYE** (Sen) (20) 14.07.04
18 Aboubakar **NAGIDA** (Cmr) (19) 28.06.05
22 Lorenz **ASSIGNON** (24) 22.06.00
33 Hans **HATEBOER** (Ned) (30) 09.01.94
36 Alidu **SEIDU** (Gha) (24) 04.06.00
48 Abdelhamid **AIT BOUDLAL** (Mar) (18) 16.04.06
55 Leo **OSTIGARD** (Nor) (25) 28.11.99

MIDFIELDERS
6 Azor **MATUSIWA** (Ned) (26) 28.04.98
7 Albert **GRONBAEK** (Den) (23) 23.05.01
8 Baptiste **SANTAMARIA** (29) 09.03.95
17 Jordan **JAMES** (Wal) (20) 02.07.04
28 Glen **KAMARA** (Fin) (29) 28.10.95
32 Naouirou **AHAMADA** (22) 29.03.02
38 Djaoui **CISSE** (20) 31.01.04

FORWARDS
9 Arnaud **KALIMUENDO** (22) 20.01.02
10 Amine **GOUIRI** (Alg) (24) 16.02.00
11 Ludovic **BLAS** (26) 31.12.97
19 Henrik **MEISTER** (Den) (21) 17.11.03
20 Andres **GOMEZ** (Col) (22) 12.09.02
27 **JOTA** (Por) (25) 30.03.99

COACH
Jorge **SAMPAOLI** (Arg) (64) 13.03.60

SAINT-ETIENNE

GOALKEEPERS
1 Brice **MAUBLEU** (35) 01.12.89
16 Boubacar **FALL** (Sen) (23) 03.02.01
30 Gautier **LARSONNEUR** (27) 23.02.97

DEFENDERS
3 Mickael **NADE** (25) 04.03.99
5 Yunis **ABDELHAMID** (Mar) (37) 28.09.87
8 Dennis **APPIAH** (32) 09.06.92
17 Pierre **CORNUD** (28) 12.12.96
19 Leo **PETROT** (27) 15.04.97
21 Dylan **BATUBINSIKA** (Cod) (28) 15.02.96
23 Anthony **BRIANCON** (30) 28.11.94
27 Yvann **MACON** (26) 01.10.98

MIDFIELDERS
4 Pierre **EKWAH** (22) 15.01.02
6 Benjamin **BOUCHOUARI** (Mar) (23) 13.11.01
7 Thomas **MONCONDUIT** (33) 10.02.91
10 Florian **TARDIEU** (32) 22.04.92
14 Louis **MOUTON** (22) 03.06.02
18 Mathieu **CAFARO** (27) 25.03.97
20 Augustine **BOAKYE** (Gha) (24) 03.11.00
26 Lamine **FOMBA** (26) 26.01.98
28 Igor **MILADINOVIC** (Srb) (21) 08.06.03
29 Aimen **MOUEFFEK** (Mar) (23) 09.04.01
37 Mathis **AMOUGOU** (18) 18.01.06

FORWARDS
9 Ibrahim **SISSOKO** (Mli) (29) 27.11.95
11 Ben **OLD** (Nzl) (22) 13.08.02
22 Zuriko **DAVITASHVILI** (Geo) (23) 15.02.01
25 Ibrahima **WADJI** (Sen) (29) 05.05.95
32 Lucas **STASSIN** (Bel) (20) 29.11.04

COACH
Olivier **DALL'OGLIO** (60) 16.05.64

STRASBOURG

GOALKEEPERS
1 Djordje **PETROVIC** (Srb) (25) 08.10.99
16 Robin **RISSER** (20) 02.12.04
30 Karl-Johan **JOHNSSON** (Swe) (34) 28.01.90
36 Alaa **BELLAAROUCH** (Mar) (22) 01.02.02

DEFENDERS
3 Thomas **DELAINE** (32) 24.03.92
4 Saidou **SOW** (Gui) (22) 04.07.02
5 Abakar **SYLLA** (Civ) (21) 25.12.02
12 Caleb **WILEY** (USA) (19) 22.12.04
22 Guela **DOUE** (Civ) (22) 17.10.02
23 Mamadou **SARR** (19) 29.08.05
25 Yoni **GOMIS** (19) 23.09.05
28 Marvin **SENAYA** (23) 28.01.01
77 Eduard **SOBOL** (Ukr) (29) 20.04.95

MIDFIELDERS
6 Felix **LEMARECHAL** (21) 07.08.03
8 **ANDREY SANTOS** (Bra) (20) 03.05.04
15 Sebastian **NANASI** (Swe) (22) 16.05.02
17 Pape **DIONG** (Sen) (18) 15.06.06
18 Junior **MWANGA** (21) 11.05.03
19 Habib **DIARRA** (Sen) (20) 03.01.04
29 Ismael **DOUKOURE** (21) 24.07.03
35 Tidiane **DIALLO** (18) 28.05.06
38 Nolan **FERRO** (18) 18.01.06

FORWARDS
7 Diego **MOREIRA** (Por) (20) 06.08.04
9 Milos **LUKOVIC** (Srb) (19) 18.11.05
10 Emanuel **EMEGHA** (Ned) (21) 03.02.03
11 Moise **SAHI** (Civ) (21) 20.12.01
14 Sekou **MARA** (22) 30.07.02
20 Oscar **PEREA** (Col) (19) 27.09.05
26 Dilane **BAKWA** (22) 26.08.02
40 Jeremy **SEBAS** (Mtq) (21) 14.04.03

COACH
Liam **ROSENIOR** (Eng) (40) 09.07.84

TOULOUSE

GOALKEEPERS
30 Alex **DOMINGUEZ** (Spa) (26) 30.07.98
40 Justin **LACOMBE** (21) 09.04.03
50 Guillaume **RESTES** (19) 11.03.05

DEFENDERS
2 Rasmus **NICOLAISEN** (Den) (27) 16.03.97
3 Mark **McKENZIE** (USA) (25) 25.02.99
4 Charlie **CRESSWELL** (Eng) (22) 17.08.02
6 Umit **AKDAG** (Rou) (21) 06.10.03
12 Warren **KAMANZI** (Nor) (24) 11.11.00
17 Gabriel **SUAZO** (Chi) (27) 09.08.97
19 Djibril **SIDIBE** (32) 29.07.92
26 Ylies **ARADJ** (19) 05.06.97

MIDFIELDERS
5 Denis **GENREAU** (Aus) (25) 21.05.99
8 Vincent **SIERRO** (Sui) (29) 08.10.95
20 Niklas **SCHMIDT** (Ger) (26) 01.03.98
21 Miha **ZAJC** (Svn) (30) 01.07.94
23 Cristian **CASSERES JR.** (Ven) (24) 20.01.00

FORWARDS
7 Zakaria **ABOUKHLAL** (Mar) (24) 18.02.00
9 Frank **MAGRI** (Cmr) (25) 04.09.99
10 Yann **GBOHO** (23) 14.01.01
13 Joshua **KING** (Nor) (32) 15.01.92
15 Aron **DONNUM** (Nor) (26) 20.04.98
80 Shavy **BABICKA** (Gab) (24) 01.06.00

COACH
Carles **MARTINEZ NOVELL** (Spa) (40) 18.05.84

(ages as of 2012.24)

Internationals

2026 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

SOUTH AMERICA Section

● *6 direct slots available, plus 1 play-off slot*

Nov 14 – Maturin
Venezuela 1 (Segovia 46)
Brazil 1 (Raphinha 43)
Venezuela: Romo – Aramburu, Ramirez, Angel, Navarro; Herrera (Casseres Jr. 15), Martinez (Rincon 69); Bello (Gonzalez 80), Savarino, Murillo (Segovia 46); Rondon (Cadiz 81).
Sent off: Gonzalez 89.
Brazil: Ederson – Vanderson, Marquinhos, Gabriel, Abner (Estevao 90+2); Gerson, Bruno Guimaraes (Martinelli 82); Savinho (Luiz Henrique 68), Raphinha, Vinicius Junior; Igor Jesus (Paqueta 68).

Nov 14 – Asuncion
Paraguay 2 (Sanabria 19, Alderete 47)
Argentina 1 (La. Martinez 11)
Paraguay: G. Fernandez – Velazquez, G. Gomez, Alderete, Alonso; D. Gomez (An. Romero 72), Cubas, Bobadilla (Villasanti 82), Almiron (Al. Romero 90); Enciso (Sosa 82), Sanabria (Pitta 72).
Argentina: E. Martinez – Molina (Montiel 78), Romero (Balerdi 46), Otamendi, Tagliafico; De Paul, E. Fernandez; Messi, Mac Allister (Garnacho 64), Alvarez (Castellanos 86); La. Martinez.

Nov 14 – Guayaquil
Ecuador 4 (Valencia 26 pen, Plata 28, 49, Minda 61)
Bolivia 0
Ecuador: Galindez – Ordonez, Pacho, Hincapie, Estupinan; Yeboah (Arroyo 69), Plata (Rodriguez 68), Franco (Paez 75), Vite, Minda (Sarmiento 68); Valencia (Mena 68).
Bolivia: Viscarra – Rocha (Sejas 80), Morales, Jo. Sagredo, E. Vaca; Villamil, H. Cuellar; Menacho (Sotomayor 46), Terrazas (Chavez 46), Paz (Lopez 46); Monteiro.
Sent off: Jo. Sagredo 24.

Nov 15 – Montevideo
Uruguay 3 (Sanchez 57 og, Aguirre 60, Ugarte 90+13)
Colombia 2 (Quintero 31, A. Gomez 90+6)
Uruguay: Rochet – Nandez, Gimenez, M. Olivera, Sarrachi (Varela 79); Bentancur, Valverde; Pellistri, Aguirre (Ugarte 68), M. Araujo; Nunez.
Colombia: Vargas – Munoz, Sanchez, Lucumi, Mojica; Rios, Portillo (Mina 90+5), J. Arias (A. Gomez 82); Quintero (James 72); Duran (Borre 72), Diaz.

Nov 15 – Lima
Peru 0
Chile 0
Peru: Caceda – Corzo (Rivera 68), M. Araujo, Callens; Polo, Sonne (Garces 87), Cartagena, Pena (Flores 78), Advincula; Guerrero (Lapadula 63), Valera (Quispe 78).
Chile: Cortes – Loyola, Maripan, Diaz, Suazo; Vidal, Echeverria, Pizarro (Pavez 90+5); Valdes; Aravena, Vargas (Mora 90+6).

Nov 19 – El Alto
Bolivia 2 (E. Vaca 15, Terceros 80 pen)
Paraguay 2 (Almiron 71, Enciso 90+1)
Bolivia: Viscarra – Medina, Haquin, Suarez, E. Vaca (Morales 46); Matheus (Chavez 70), H. Cuellar, R. Vaca; Terceros, Alganaraz (Monteiro 70), R. Fernandez (Villamil 70).
Paraguay: G. Fernandez – Caceres, Balbuena, G. Gomez, Alonso, Sandez (Enciso 46); Galarza, Villasanti (Oviedo 87), D. Gomez (Al. Romero 65), Almiron (Sosa 86); Arce (Sanabria 65).

Nov 19 – Barranquilla
Colombia 0
Ecuador 1 (Valencia 7)
Colombia: Vargas – Munoz, Sanchez, Lucumi, Mojica (A. Gomez 90+3); Rios (Quintero 59), Portillo, J. Arias (Duran 59); James; Cordoba (Borre 86), Diaz.
Ecuador: Galindez – Ordonez, Pacho, Hincapie, Estupinan (Mercado 90+2); Plata (Rodriguez 79), M. Caicedo, Franco, Vite (Torres 46), Minda (Chavez 60); Valencia (Gruezo 46).
Sent off: Hincapie 34.

Nov 19 – Buenos Aires
Argentina 1 (La. Martinez 55)
Peru 0
Argentina: E. Martinez – Montiel (Perez 76), Balerdi (Medina 90), Otamendi, Tagliafico; De Paul (Lo Celso 81), Fernandez; Mac Allister (Paredes 90); Messi, La. Martinez (Simeone 81), Alvarez.
Peru: Gallese – M. Araujo, Zambrano, Callens; Polo (Rivera 86), Sonne (Reyna 73), Castillo, Pena (Quispe 86), Advincula; Guerrero (Lapadula 64), Valera (Flores 73).

Nov 19 – Santiago
Chile 4 (E. Vargas 20, Rincon 29 og, Cepeda 38, 47)
Venezuela 2 (Savarino 13, R. Ramirez 22)
Chile: Cortes – Hormazabal, Maripan, Diaz, Suazo; Echeverria, Pizarro (Pavez 81); Aravena, Vidal (Cabral 67), Cepeda (Guerrero 81); Vargas (Mora 81).
Venezuela: Romo – Aramburu (Ferraresi 71), Ramirez, Angel, Navarro (Cadiz 81); Martinez, Rincon (Murillo 55); Savarino (Andrade 71), Segovia, Soteldo; Rondon (Ramirez 71).

Nov 19 – Salvador
Brazil 1 (Gerson 62)
Uruguay 1 (Valverde 55)
Brazil: Ederson – Danilo, Marquinhos, Gabriel, Abner (Martinelli 58); Savinho (Willian Estevao 73), Gerson (Paqueta 86), Bruno Guimaraes (Andre 86), Raphinha; Igor Jesus (Luiz Henrique 58), Vinicius Junior.
Uruguay: Rochet – Varela, Gimenez, M. Olivera, Sarrachi; Valverde, Ugarte, Bentancur; Pellistri (Rodriguez 66), Nunez (Aguirre 46), M. Araujo (C. Olivera 81).

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Argentina	12	8	1	3	21	7	25
Uruguay	12	5	5	2	17	9	20
Ecuador*	12	6	4	2	11	4	19
Colombia	12	5	4	3	15	10	19
Brazil	12	5	3	4	17	11	18
Paraguay	12	4	5	3	8	7	17
Bolivia	12	4	1	7	13	27	13
Venezuela	12	2	6	4	11	15	12
Chile	12	2	3	7	9	20	9
Peru	12	1	4	7	3	15	7

**Deducted 3 points*

ASIA Section

● *8 direct slots available, plus 1 play-off slot*

Third Round

Group A

Nov 14 – Vientiane
North Korea 2 (Taremi 56 og, Kim Yu-song 59)
Iran 3 (Ghayedi 29, Mohebi 41, 45)

Nov 14 – Doha
Qatar 3 (Almoez 25, 41, Mendes 90+12)
Uzbekistan 2 (Fayzullaev 75, 80)

Nov 14 – Abu Dhabi
United Arab Emirates 3 (Abdalla 15, 89, Meloni 35)
Kyrgyzstan 0

Nov 19 – Vientiane
North Korea 0
Uzbekistan 1 (Fayzullaev 44)

Nov 19 – Bishkek
Kyrgyzstan 2 (Kojo 51, 64 pen)
Iran 3 (Taremi 12, Hardani 33, Azmoun 76)

Nov 19 – Abu Dhabi
United Arab Emirates 5 (Fabio Lima 4, 45 pen, 45+5, 56 pen, Al Ghassani 73)
Qatar 0

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran	6	5	1	0	12	5	16
Uzbekistan	6	4	1	1	8	5	13
UAE	6	3	1	2	12	4	10
Qatar	6	2	1	3	10	17	7
Kyrgyzstan	6	1	0	5	6	13	3
North Korea	6	0	2	4	5	9	2

Group B

Nov 14 – Kuwait City
Kuwait 1 (Daham 60)
South Korea 3 (Oh Se-hun 10, Son Heung-min 19 pen, Bae Jun-ho 74)

Nov 14 – Muscat
Oman 1 (Al Ghassani 83)
Palestine 0

Nov 14 – Basra
Iraq 0
Jordan 0

Nov 19 – Amman
Palestine 1 (Qunbar 12)
South Korea 1 (Son Heung-min 16)

Nov 19 – Muscat
Oman 0
Iraq 1 (Amyn 36)

Nov 19 – Kuwait City
Kuwait 1 (Daham 68)
Jordan 1 (Al Naimat 21)

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea	6	4	2	0	12	5	14
Iraq	6	3	2	1	5	3	11
Jordan	6	2	3	1	9	5	9
Oman	6	2	0	4	6	9	6
Kuwait	6	0	4	2	5	11	4
Palestine	6	0	3	3	4	8	3

Group C

Nov 14 – Melbourne
Australia 0
Saudi Arabia 0

Nov 14 – Riffa
Bahrain 0
China 1 (Zhang Yuning 90+1)

Nov 14 – Jakarta
Indonesia 0
Japan 4 (Hubner 35 og, Minamino 40, Morita 49, Sugawara 69)

Nov 19 – Xiamen
China 1 (Lin Liangming 48)
Japan 3 (Ogawa 39, 54, Itakura 45+6)

Nov 19 – Jakarta
Indonesia 2 (Marselino 32, 57)
Saudi Arabia 0

Nov 19 – Riffa
Bahrain 2 (Abduljabbar 75, 77)
Australia 2 (Yengi 1, 90+6)

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	6	5	1	0	22	2	16
Australia	6	1	4	1	6	5	7
Indonesia	6	1	3	2	6	9	6
Saudi Arabia	6	1	3	2	3	6	6
Bahrain	6	1	3	2	5	10	6
China	6	2	0	4	6	16	6

OCEANIA Section

● *1 direct slot available, plus 1 play-off slot*

Second Round

Group A

Nov 14 – Port Moresby
Solomon Islands 2 (Lea'i 9, J. Alick 39)
New Caledonia 3 (Athale 6 pen, 59 pen, Waia 69)

Nov 14 – Port Moresby
Papua New Guinea 3 (Joe 2, Kepo 45, Gunemba 90+4)
Fiji 3 (Dunn 42, Krishna 54 pen, Nand 90+5)

Nov 17 – Port Moresby
Fiji 1 (Krishna 45+4 pen)
New Caledonia 1 (Katrawa 59)

Nov 17 – Port Moresby
Papua New Guinea 1 (Semmy 90+2)
Solomon Islands 2 (David 41, Lea'alafa 68)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
New Caledonia*	3	2	1	0	7	4	7
Fiji*	3	1	2	0	5	4	5
Solomon Islands	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
PNG	3	0	1	2	5	8	1

**Advance to third round*

Group B

Nov 15 – Hamilton
Samoa 0
Tahiti 3 (Kaspard 59, Mathon 65, T. Tehau 87)

Nov 15 – Hamilton
New Zealand 8 (Garbett 11, Wood 23, 24, Bindon 32, Kaltak 38 og, Just 74, Singh 82, McCowatt 89)
Vanuatu 1 (Tasip 17)

Nov 18 – Auckland
Tahiti 2 (Spokeyjack 8 og, Mathon 67 pen)
Vanuatu 0

Nov 18 – Auckland
Samoa 0
New Zealand 8 (McCowatt 24, Wood 28, 34, 60, Stamenic 62, De Vries 75, Just 87, Waine 90+2 pen)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
New Zealand*	3	3	0	0	19	1	9
Tahiti*	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
Vanuatu	3	1	0	2	5	11	3
Samoa	3	0	0	3	1	15	0

**Advance to third round*

Third Round Draw

Semi-Finals

Mar 21:
New Caledonia v Tahiti; New Zealand v Fiji

Final

Mar 25:
New Caledonia/Tahiti v New Zealand/Fiji

● *Winners qualify for 2026 World Cup, losers advance to inter-confederational play-offs*

2024-25 UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE

Group A1

Nov 15 – Porto
Portugal 5 (Leao 59, Ronaldo 72 pen, 87, Fernandes 80, Neto 83)
Poland 1 (Marczuk 88)
Portugal: D. Costa – Dalot, A. Silva, Veiga, Mendes (Tavares 88); J. Neves (Vitinha 46), B. Silva (S. Costa 76); Neto (Trincao 84), Fernandes, Leao (Felix 84); Ronaldo.
Poland: Bulka – Piatkowski, Bednarek (Walukiewicz 46), Kiwior; Romanczuk; Bereszynski (Kaminski 32), Urbanski (Buksa 73), Zielinski, Zalewski; Piatek (Kozubal 80), Bogusz (Marczuk 46).

Nov 15 – Glasgow
Scotland 1 (McGinn 86)
Croatia 0
Scotland: Gordon – Ralston, Souttar, Hanley (McKenna 46), Robertson; Gilmour, McLean (McGinn 67); Doak (Armstrong 90+2), McTominay, Christie (Gauld 67); Conway (Dykes 67).

Croatia: Kotarski – Jakic (Pjaca 82), Sutalo, Caleta-Car, Gvardiol; Modric, Kovacic; L. Sucic (Perisic 65), P. Sucic, Baturina (Vlasic 75); Kramaric (Mario Pasalic 65).
Sent off: P. Sucic 43

Nov 18 – Split
Croatia 1 (Gvardiol 65)
Portugal 1 (Felix 33)
Croatia: Livakovic – Perisic (L. Sucic 58), Sutalo, Caleta-Car, Gvardiol, Sosa (Jakic 46); Kramaric, Modric (Moro 78), Kovacic (Mario Pasalic 46), Baturina; Matanovic (Budimir 64).
Portugal: Sa – Araujo (Djalo 63), Veiga, Mendes (Dalot 81); Semedo, Otavio (Conceicao 71), J. Neves, Vitinha, Cancelo; Leao (F. Silva 71), Felix.

Nov 18– Warsaw
Poland 1 (Piatkowski 59)
Scotland 2 (McGinn 3, Robertson 90+3)
Poland: Skorupski – Piatkowski, Walukiewicz, Kiwior; Kaminski (Puchacz 63), S. Szymanski, Moder (Slisz 46), Zielinski, Zalewski; Buksa, Swiderski (Urbanski 75).
Scotland: Gordon – Ralston (Devlin 76), Souttar, Hanley, Robertson; Gilmour (Armstrong 87), McLean; Doak (Christie 66), McTominay (Gauld 76), McGinn; Dykes (Shankland 66).

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal (Q)	6	4	2	0	13	5	14
Croatia (Q)	6	2	2	2	8	8	8
Scotland*	6	2	1	3	7	8	7
Poland (R)	6	1	1	4	9	16	4

**Enter relegation play-offs*

Group A2

Nov 14 – Brussels
Belgium 0
Italy 1 (Tonali 11)
Belgium: Casteels – Castagne (Bakayoko 86), Faes, Debast, Theate (Al Dakhil 71), De Cuyper (Lukebakio 79); Engels (Vermeeren 71), Onana, Trossard; Lukaku, Openda.
Italy: Donnarumma – Di Lorenzo, Buongiorno, Bastoni; Cambiaso (Gatti 82), Frattesi, Rovella (Locatelli 79), Tonali, Dimarco (Udogie 69); Barella (Raspadori 79); Retegui (Kean 69).

Nov 14 – Saint-Denis
France 0
Israel 0
France: Maignan – Kounde, Konate, Upamecano, T. Hernandez; Kante, Camavinga (Rabiot 71); Olise (Coman 70), Zaire-Emery (M. Thuram 78), Barcola (Nkunku 71); Kolo Muani.
Israel: Peretz – Jehezkel (Khalaili 84), Nachimas, Shlomo, Goldberg, Abada (Haziza 80); Solomon (Saba 72), Jaber, Abu Fani, Gloukh (Dor Peretz 84); Turgeman (David 73).

Nov 17 – Budapest
Israel 1 (Shua 86)
Belgium 0
Israel: Peretz – Dasa (Shua 74), Nachimas, Shlomo, Goldberg, Solomon; Dor Peretz (Haziza 74), Jaber, Abu Fani (Gandelman 61), Gloukh (Azoulay 88); David (Saba 61).
Belgium: Casteels – Al Dakhil (Sardella 90+3), Faes, Debast (Smets 46), Castagne; Vermeeren (Lokonga 67), Mangala; Lukebakio, Engels (Bassette 90+3), Trossard (Bakayoko 37); Openda.

Nov 17 – Milan
Italy 1 (Cambiaso 35)
France 3 (Rabiot 2, 65, Vicario 33 og)
Italy: Vicario – Di Lorenzo, Buongiorno, Bastoni; Cambiaso (Maldini 78), Frattesi (Raspadori 67), Locatelli (Rovella 67), Tonali, Dimarco (Udogie 83); Barella; Retegui (Kean 66).
France: Maignan – Kounde (Pavard 82), Konate, Saliba, Digne; Guendouzi, Kone, Rabiot; Nkunku; Kolo Muani, M. Thuram (Barcola 78).

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France (Q)	6	4	1	1	12	6	13
Italy (Q)	6	4	1	1	13	8	13
Belgium*	6	1	1	4	6	9	4
Israel (R)	6	1	1	4	5	13	4

**Enter relegation play-offs*

Group A3

Nov 16 – Freiburg
Germany 7 (Musiala 2, Kleindienst 23, 79, Havertz 37, Wirtz 50, 57, Sane 66)
Bosnia & Herzegovina 0
Germany: Baumann – Kimmich (Koch 73), Rudiger, Tah, Mittelstadt (Henrichs 58); Andrich (Nmecha 58), Gross; Wirtz (Gnabry 58), Havertz, Musiala (Sane 58); Kleindienst.
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Vasilj – Omerovic, Barisic, Bicakcic, Muharemovic, Burnic; Gigovic (Bajraktarevic 62), Sunjic (Huseinbasic 74), Tahirovic (Basic 63); Kulenovic (Bazdar 63), Demirovic (Hajradinovic 85).

Nov 16 – Amsterdam
Netherlands 4 (Weghorst 21 pen, Gakpo 45+12 pen, Dumfries 64, Koopmeiners 86)
Hungary 0
Netherlands: Verbruggen – Dumfries, Van Hecke, Van Dijk, J. Timber (Hato 68); Gravenberch (Wieffer 79), De Jong (Koopmeiners 68), Reijnders; Malen (Frimpong 84), Weghorst, Gakpo (Lang 79).
Hungary: Dibusz – Balogh, Orban, Dardai; Nego (Gera 74), Nikitscher, Schafer (A. Nagy 74), Z. Nagy; Sallai (Csoboth 80), Szoboszlai; Varga (Szabo 60).

Nov 19 – Budapest
Hungary 1 (Szoboszlai 90+9 pen)
Germany 1 (Nmecha 76)
Hungary: Dibusz – Fiola, Orban, Dardai; Nego (Gera 65), Nikitscher (Kata 65), Schafer, Z. Nagy (Schon 82); Sallai (Csoboth 82), Szoboszlai; Varga (Gruber 89).
Germany: Nubel – Kimmich (Gosens 46), Koch, Schlotterbeck, Henrichs; Andrich, Nmecha; Sane (Kleindienst 80), Brandt (Havertz 61), Fuhrich (Musiala 61); Gnabry (Wirtz 61).

Nov 19 – Zenica
Bosnia & Herzegovina 1 (Demirovic 67)
Netherlands 1 (Brobbey 24)
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Zlomislic – Bicakcic (Bazdar 63), Barisic, Muharemovic, Burnic; Dedic, Sunjic, Tahirovic (Basic 86), Gigovic (Bajraktarevic 63); Demirovic (Kulenovic 86), Dzeko (Dakovac 90+2).
Netherlands: Flekken – Frimpong (Rensch 66), De Vrij, De Ligt, Hato; Wieffer, Koopmeiners; Kluivert (Malen 66), Zirkzee (Weghorst 77), Lang (Gakpo 77); Brobbey (Gravenberch 71).

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany (Q)	6	4	2	0	18	4	14
Netherlands (Q)	6	2	3	1	13	7	9
Hungary*	6	1	3	2	4	11	6
Bosnia-Herz (R)	6	0	2	4	4	17	2

**Enter relegation play-offs*

Group A4

Nov 15 – Copenhagen
Denmark 1 (Isaksen 84)
Spain 2 (Oyarzabal 15, Ayoze 58)
Denmark: Schmeichel – Bah, Andersen, Vestergaard, Kristiansen (Dorgu 87); Hojbjerg, Norgaard (Damsgaard 61), Hjulmand; Eriksen (Skov Olsen 79), Hojlund (Dolberg 79), Gronbaek (Isaksen 61).
Spain: Raya – Porro, Vivian, Laporte, Cucurella; Zubimendi (Casado 70), Merino (Pedri 80); Oyarzabal, Olmo (Williams 70), Baena (Fabian 62); Ayoze (Morata 69).

Nov 15 – Zurich
Switzerland 1 (Amdouni 78)
Serbia 1 (Terzic 88)
Switzerland: Kobel – Fernandes (Mbabu 83), Comert, Amenda, Rodriguez (Garcia 89); Xhaka, Freuler; Rieder (Monteiro 66), Amdouni, Okafor (Kutesa 65); Embolo (Zeqiri 66).
Serbia: Petrovic – Veljkovic, Milenkovic, Babic (Stojic 46); Zivkovic (Nedeljkovic 78), N. Maksimovic, Gudelj, Terzic (Zdjelar 90); Samardzic (Topic 72); Vlahovic, A. Mitrovic (A. Maksimovic 90).

Nov 18 – Leskovac
Serbia 0
Denmark 0
Serbia: Petrovic – Veljkovic, Milenkovic, Pavlovic; Zivkovic (Ivanovic 82), Samardzic (A. Maksimovic 73), Gudelj (Zdjelar 72), N. Maksimovic, Terzic; Vlahovic (Nedeljkovic 88), A. Mitrovic.
Sent off: Pavlovic 90+5.
Denmark: Schmeichel – Roerslev, Nelsson, Vestergaard, Kristiansen; Eriksen, Hjulmand, Damsgaard (Gronbaek 71); Isaksen (Skov Olsen 87), Dolberg (Hojlund 70), Poulsen (Norgaard 53).

Nov 18 – Tenerife
Spain 3 (Yeremy 32, Gil 68, Zaragoza 90+3 pen)
Switzerland 2 (Monteiro 63, Zeqiri 85 pen)
Spain: Remiro (Sanchez 46) – Mingueza, Cubarsi, Paredes, Grimaldo; Pedri (Barrios 79), Casado, Fabian; Yeremy (Zaragoza 69), Morata (Omorodion 46), Williams (Gil 60).
Switzerland: Mvogo – Fernandes, Comert, Rodriguez, Muheim; Freuler, Xhaka (Sierro 60); Ugrinic (Monteiro 46), Sohm (Rieder 60), Kutesa (Okafor 72); Amdouni (Zeqiri 46).

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain (Q)	6	5	1	0	13	4	16
Denmark (Q)	6	2	2	2	7	5	8
Serbia*	6	1	3	2	3	6	6
Switzerland (R)	6	0	2	4	6	14	2

**Enter relegation play-offs*

Group B1

Nov 16 – Batumi
Georgia 1 (Mikautadze 76)
Ukraine 1 (Kverkvelia 7 og)
Georgia: Mamardashvili – Kvirkvelia (Gocholeishvili 67), Kashia, Lochoshvili; Kakabadze, Kiteishvili (Mekvabishvili 86), Kochorashvili, Shengelia (Tsitaishvili 67); Chakvetadze (Davitashvili 46), Kvaratskhelia; Zivzivadze (Mikautadze 67).
Ukraine: Trubin – Konoplya, Zabarnyi, Matviyenko, Mykolenko; Brazkho (Kaliuzhnyi 80); Zubkov (Hutsuliak 64), Shaparenko (Kryskiv 64), Sudakov (Nazarenko 86), Mudryk; Dobvyk (Yaremchuk 80).

Nov 16 – Tirana
Albania 0
Czech Republic 0
Albania: Strakosha – Balliu, Ismajli, Ajeti, Mitaj; Ramadani; Asani (Seferi 30), Laci (Abrashi 85), Asllani, Bajrami (Muci 72); Tuci (Uzuni 85).
Czech Republic: Kovar – Coufal, Holes, Jemelka, Boril; Cerv; Cerny (Kliment 65), Soucek, Sulc (Kutchta 83), Provod (Lingr 83); Chory (Hlozek 65).

Nov 19 – Tirana
Albania 1 (Bajrami 75 pen)
Ukraine 2 (Zinchenko 5, Yaremchuk 10)
Albania: Strakosha – Balliu, Ismajli, Ajeti, Mitaj; Laci (Seferi 90), Ramadani (Tuci 76), Asllani; Asani (Bajrami 46), Daku (Uzuni 46), Muci (Hoxha 51).
Ukraine: Trubin – Konoplya (Sych 76), Zabarnyi, Matviyenko, Mykolenko; Kaliuzhnyi; Hutsuliak (Nazarenko 85), Zinchenko (Shaparenko 69), Sudakov, Mudryk (Talovierov 85); Yaremchuk (Dobvyk 76).

Nov 19 – Olomouc
Czech Republic 2 (Sulc 3, Hlozek 24)
Georgia 1 (Mikautadze 60)
Czech Republic: Kovar – Coufal, Holes, Jemelka, Boril; Sulc (Kuchta 88), Kral, Cerv; Cerny (Provod 57), Kliment (Chytil 57), Hlozek (Lingr 73).
Georgia: Mamardashvili – Gvelesiani (Davitashvili 36), Kashia, Dvali; Kakabadze (Gocholeishvili 79), Chakvetadze (Zivzivadze 61), Kiteishvili (Mekvabishvili 60), Kochorashvili, Lochoshvili; Kvaratskhelia, Mikautadze (Lobjanidze 79).

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Czech Rep (P)	6	3	2	1	9	8	11
Ukraine*	6	2	2	2	8	8	8
Georgia**	6	2	1	3	7	6	7
Albania (R)	6	2	1	3	4	6	7

**Enter promotion play-offs*
***Enter relegation play-offs*

Group B2

Nov 14 – Athens
Greece 0
England 3 (Watkins 7, Vlachodimos 78 og, Jones 83)
Greece: Vlachodimos – Rota, Mavropanos, Koulierakis, Tsimikas (Pelkas 57); Siopis (Mantalos 82), Zafeiris; Masouras (Konstantelias 70), Bakasetas (Ioannidis 57), Tzolis; Pavlidis (Giannoulis 56).
England: Pickford – Walker, Konsa (Hall 46), Guehi, Lewis; Gallagher (Gibbs-White 79), Jones; Madueke (Bowen 66), Bellingham, Gordon (Rogers 66); Watkins (Kane 66).

Nov 14 – Dublin
Republic of Ireland 1 (Ferguson 45)
Finland 0
Republic of Ireland: Kelleher – Doherty (O'Shea 76), Collins, Scales, O'Dowda; Ebosele (Molumby 76), Cullen, Knight, Johnston (Manning 85); Szmodics (Cannon 85), Ferguson (Azaz 76).
Finland: Hradecky – Alho (Niskanen 85), Hoskonen, Ivanov, Peltola (O'Shaughnessy 58), Uronen (Hakans 64); Lod, Kamara, Kairinen, Antman (Pohjanpalo 64); Kallman (Pukki 84).

Nov 17 – Wembley
England 5 (Kane 53 pen, Gordon 56, Gallagher 58, Bowen 76, Harwood-Bellis 79)
Republic of Ireland 0
England: Pickford – Livramento, Walker (Harwood-Bellis 62), Guehi, Hall; Gallagher (Solanke 75), Jones (Gomes 79); Madueke (Bowen 75), Bellingham, Gordon (Rogers 75); Kane.
Republic of Ireland: Kelleher – O'Shea, McGuinness, Scales, O'Dowda (Azaz 67); Collins; Ebosele (Manning 67), Molumby, Cullen (Moran 76), Szmodics (McAteer 86); Ferguson (Parrott 67).
Sent off: Scales 51.

Nov 17 – Helsinki
Finland 0
Greece 2 (Bakasetas 52, Tzolis 56)
Finland: Joronen – Alho (Niskanen 82), Hoskonen, Ivanov, Pikkarainen (Ollila 67), Hakans (Pukki 75); Lod, Kamara (Nissila 75), Kairinen, Kallman; Pohjanpalo (Antman 67).
Greece: Vlachodimos – Rota, Mavropanos, Koulierakis, Tsimikas; Kourbelis (Mouzakitis 90+1), Mantalos (Retsos 88); Masouras (Siopis 75), Bakasetas (Pelkas 75), Tzolis (Giannoulis 87); Pavlidis.

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England (P)	6	5	0	1	16	3	15
Greece*	6	5	0	1	11	4	15
Rep of Ireland**	6	2	0	4	3	12	6
Finland (R)	6	0	0	6	2	13	0

**Enter promotion play-offs*
***Enter relegation play-offs*

Group B3

Nov 14 – Almaty
Kazakhstan 0
Austria 2 (Baumgartner 15, Gregoritsch 25)
Kazakhstan: Pokatilov – Astanov, Kasym, Marochkin, Vorogovskiy; Darabayev (Tapalov 57), Tagybergen; Zaynutdinov (Payruz 69), Islamkhan (Zhumakhanov 26), Samorodov (Kenzhebek 68); Aymbetov (Karimov 46).
Sent off: Marochkin 23.
Austria: A. Schlager – Posch (Mwene 64), Danso, Lienhart, Prass; Seiwald, Laimer (Seidl 64); Schmid (Weimann 77), Baumgartner (Adamu 72), Wimmer (Stoger 72); Gregoritsch.

Nov 14 – Ljubljana
Slovenia 1 (Sesko 21 pen)
Norway 4 (Nusa 4, 59, Haaland 45, Hauge 82)
Slovenia: Oblak – Karnicnik (Brekalo 72), Drkusic, Bijol, Janza; Stojanovic (Seslar 81), Gnezda Cerin (Kurtic 81), Elsnik, Mlakar (Lovric 72); Vipotnik (Celar 72), Sesko.
Norway: Selvik – Pedersen, Ostigard, Heggem (Gregersen 87), Ryerson; Donnum (Thorsby 46), Berg Johnsen (Thorstvedt 60), Berge, Nusa (Hague 70); Sorloth, Haaland (Strand Larsen 87).

Nov 17 – Vienna
Austria 1 (Schmid 27)
Slovenia 1 (Gnezda Cerin 81)
Austria: Pentz – Posch, Lienhart, Wober, Mwene; Seiwald, Laimer (Grillitsch 90); Schmid (Gregoritsch 83), Baumgartner, Sabitzer; Arnautovic (Wimmer 90).
Slovenia: Oblak – Karnicnik, Brekalo, Bijol, Janza; Stojanovic (Petrovic 65), Gnezda Cerin, Elsnik (Lovric 81), Mlakar (Sporar 81); Vipotnik (Drkusic 90+1), Sesko.

Nov 17 – Oslo
Norway 5 (Haaland 23, 37, 71, Sorloth 41, Nusa 76)
Kazakhstan 0
Norway: Selvik – Pedersen (Heggem 63), Gregersen (Langas 73), Ostigard, Ryerson; Thorstvedt (Berg 63), Berge; Sorloth (Strand Larsen 63), Thorsby, Nusa; Haaland (Rosler 86).
Kazakhstan: Pokatilov – Astanov, Kasym, Alip, Vorogovskiy; Chesnokov (Payruz 51), Tapalov (Islamkhan 46), Tagybergen (Baltabekov 90), Samorodov (Astanov 68); Zaynutdinov, Aymbetov (Zhaksylykov 46).

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Norway (P)	6	4	1	1	15	7	13
Austria*	6	3	2	1	14	5	11
Slovenia**	6	2	2	2	7	9	8
Kazakhstan (R)	6	0	1	5	0	15	1

**Enter promotion play-offs*
***Enter relegation play-offs*

Group B4

Nov 16 – Niksic
Montenegro 0
Iceland 2 (Oskarsson 74, Johannesson 88)
Montenegro: Nikic – Marusic, Vujacic, Sipcic, Radunovic; Jankovic, Bakic (Loncar 74); Radulovic (Kuc 46), Jovovic, Camaj (Mugosa 69); Krstovic.
Iceland: Valdimarsson – Lunddal Fridriksson, Ingason, Gunnarsson (Palsson 20), Tomasson; Gudmundsson, Thordharson (Johannesson 68), Traustason, Thorsteinsson (Ellertsson 68); Oskarsson (Willumsson 90), Gudjohnsen.

Nov 16 – Kayseri
Turkey 0
Wales 0
Turkey: Gunok – Muldur, Demiral, Bardakci, Elmali (Celik 75); Akgun, Kokcu, Calhanoglu (Yuksek 46), Alper Yilmaz (Unal 65); Guler (Ayhan 86); Akturkoglu.
Wales: Darlow – C. Roberts, Rodon, B. Davies, Williams; Sheehan, J. James (Brooks 73); Johnson (Koumas 90), Wilson, Thomas (Cullen 72); Harris (D. James 46).

Nov 19 – Niksic
Montenegro 3 (Krstovic 29, 45, 73)
Turkey 1 (Yildiz 37)
Montenegro: Nikic – Tuci, Vujacic, Sipcic; Vukcevic, Vukotic (Kuc 69), Jankovic, Loncar, Gasevic (Camaj 86); Krstovic, Jovetic (Brnovic 83).
Turkey: Gunok – Ayhan (Kilicsoy 82), Demiral, Topcu (Akaydin 46), Elmali (Muldur 46); Yokuslu (Yuksek 63), Kokcu; Akgun (Alper Yilmaz 74), Guler, Yildiz; Akturkoglu.

Nov 19 – Cardiff
Wales 4 (Cullen 32, 45+1, Johnson 65, Wilson 79)
Iceland 1 (Gudjohnsen 8)
Wales: Ward – Williams, Rodon, Cabango, B. Davies; Wilson, Sheehan (J. James 89); Johnson (C. Roberts 89), Cullen, D. James (Thomas 73); Harris (Allen 65).
Iceland: Valdirmarsson – Sampsted (Thorhallson 74), Ingason, Palsson, Lunddal Fridriksson; Johannesson, Traustason, Gudmundsson (Thordharson 46), Thorsteinsson (Willumsson 74); Oskarsson (Ellertsson 25), Gudjohnsen.

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wales (P)	6	3	3	0	9	4	12
Turkey*	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
Iceland**	6	2	1	3	10	13	7
Montenegro (R)	6	1	0	5	4	9	3

**Enter promotion play-offs*
***Enter relegation play-offs*

Group C1

Nov 16 – Qabala
Azerbaijan 0
Estonia 0
Azerbaijan: Jafarov – A. Huseynov, Mammadov (Mustafazade 5), B. Huseynov, Cafarquliyev; Diniyev, Isayev; Bayramov (Akhundzade 70), Kokcu (Najafov 88), Sheydayev; Qurbanli.
Estonia: Hein – Pakotsi, J. Tamm, Mets, Schjonning-Larsen; Palumets (Soomets 88), Poom; Miller (Yakolev 64), Shein (Vetkal 68), Sinyavskiy; Anier (A. Tamm 63).

Nov 16 – Stockholm
Sweden 2 (Gyokeres 3, Isak 48)
Slovakia 1 (Hancko 19)
Sweden: Johansson – Lindelof (Starfelt 26), Hien, Gudmundsson; Eliasson (Holm 75), Ayari (Karlstrom 75), Saletros, Sema; Kulusevski; Isak, Gyokeres.
Slovakia: Dubravka – Gyomber, Vavro (Obert 40), Skriniar, Hancko; Duda (Rigo 67), Lobotka, Benes (Bero 58); Suslov, Strelec, Duris (Schranz 57).
Sent off: Skriniar 90.

Nov 19 – Trnava
Slovakia 1 (Strelec 72)
Estonia 0
Slovakia: Grief – Gyomber, Vavro, Obert, Hancko; Bero, Lobotka (Hrosovsky 60), Benes (Rigo 88); Suslov (Schranz 77), Bozenik (Strelec 46), Tupta (Sauer 60).
Estonia: Hein – Schjonning-Larsen, Paskotsi, Mets, Saliste (Peetson 71); Palumets (J. Tamm 87), Poom (Shein 60); Yakovlev, Kristal (Vetkal 71), Sinyavskiy (Kuraksin 71); A. Tamm.

Nov 19 – Stockholm
Sweden 6 (Kulusevski 10, 57, Gyokeres 26, 37, 58, 70)
Azerbaijan 0
Sweden: Johansson – Starfelt, Gudmundsson (Zatterstrom 89), Sema; Ayari (Holm 51), Karlstrom (Bergvall 66), Saletros, Nanasi (Forsberg 66); Kulusevski; Gyokeres (Lidberg 89), Isak.
Azerbaijan: Jafarov – Seydiyev (A. Huseynov 56), Mustafazade, B. Huseynov (Z. Aliyev 46), Kryvotsyuk; Diniyev, Kokcu (Nuriyev 46), Isayev (Qurbanli 64); Emreli, Akhundzade (Sheydayev 46), Bayramov.

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sweden (P)	6	5	1	0	19	4	16
Slovakia*	6	4	1	1	10	5	13
Estonia	6	1	1	4	3	9	4
Azerbaijan (R)	6	0	1	5	3	17	1

**Enter promotion play-offs*

Group C2

Nov 15 – Larnaca
Cyprus 2 (Kastanos 18, Tzionis 63)
Lithuania 1 (Gineitis 47)
Cyprus: Demetriou – Karo, Andreou, Panagiotou, Ioannou (Malekkides 46); Kastanos (Satsias 81), Artymatas, Charalampous (Kousoulos 56); Loizou (Makris 76), Pittas, Kakoullis (Tzionis 56).
Lithuania: Bertasius – Sirvys (Cernych 60), Kazukolovas, Girdvainis, Tutyskinas (Milasius 60); Dolznikov (Kalinauskas 46), Golubickas (Jansonas 80), Vorobjovas (Matulevicius 60), Gineitis, Lasickas; Paulauskas.

Nov 15 – Bucharest
Romania A
Kosovo A
Match abandoned
Romania awarded a 3-0 win by forfeit
Romania: Nita – Ratiu, Dragusin, Burca, Bancu; R. Marin, M. Marin (Sut 77), Stanciu (Olaru 46); Man (Alibec 64), Dragus (Hagi 89), Mihaila.
Kosovo: Muric – Hadergjonaj, Am. Rrahmani, Dellova, Vojvoda; Rexhbecaj, Berisha; Zhegrova, Muslija (Asllani 82), Jashari (Bytyqi 82); Muriqi (Al. Rrahmani 71).

Nov 18 – Prishtina
Kosovo 1 (Jashari 5)
Lithuania 0
Kosovo: Muric – Hadergjonaj, Krasniqi, Aliti, Vojvoda; Zhegrova (Hoti 79), Rexhbecaj, Berisha (Emerllahu 46), Jashari; Al. Rrahmani (Bytyqi 46), Muriqi (Asllani 80).
Sent off: Jashari 45+1.
Lithuania: Germontas – Sirvys, Utkus, Girdvainis, Milasius, Lasickas; Cernych (Golubickas 60), Vorobjovas (Jansonas 80), Gineitis; Slivka, Paulauskas.

Nov 18 – Bucharest
Romania 4 (Birligea 2, R. Marin 41, 80, Coman 83)
Cyprus 1 (Pittas 52)
Romania: Nita (Tarnovanu 67) – Ratiu, Dragusin (Burca 68), Pascanu, Bancu; R. Marin, M. Marin (Coman 67), Olaru (Sut 66); Hagi, Birligea, Mihaila (Mitrita 84).
Cyprus: Demetriou – Karo (Antoniou 46), Andreou, Laifis, Anderson Correia; Loizou, Spoljaric (Charalampous 46), Artymatas, Kakoullis (Pittas 46); Sotiriou (Panagioutou 79), Tzionis (Makris 74).
Sent off: Laifis 77.

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Romania (P)	6	6	0	0	18	3	18
Kosovo*	6	4	0	2	10	7	12
Cyprus	6	2	0	4	4	15	6
Lithuania (R)	6	0	0	6	4	11	0

**Enter promotion play-offs*

Group C3

Nov 15 – Luxembourg
Luxembourg 0
Bulgaria 1 (Kraev 23)
Luxembourg: Pereira-Cardoso – Jans, Korac, Carlson, Pinto (Dzogovic 85); C. Martins, Moreira; Sinani, Olesen (Rupil 77), Bohnert (Omosanya 62); Rodrigues.
Bulgaria: Mitov – Popov, S. Petrov, A. Petkov, Nurnberger; Panayotov, Kraev (Antov 83); Milanov (Atanasov 62), Krastev (Ahmedov 78), Despodov; Kolev (Kirilov 78).

Nov 15 – Belfast
Northern Ireland 2 (Ballard 50, D. Charles 63 pen)
Belarus 0
Northern Ireland: P. Charles – Hume, Ballard (Saville 76), Brown; Bradley (Lyons 90), McCann, S. Charles, Spencer; Price (McConville 86); Smyth (Reid 76), D. Charles (Magennis 76).
Belarus: Lapoukhov – Pigas, Martynovich, Politevich, Zabelin, Pechenin (Prishchepa 72); Yablonskiy (Klimovich 62), Selyava (Ebong 62), Gromyko (Demchenko 72); Barkovskiy (Antilevskiy 62), Shikavka.

Nov 18 – Sofia
Bulgaria 1 (Panayotov 12)
Belarus 1 (Kavalyow 70)
Bulgaria: Mitov – Popov, S. Petrov, A. Petkov, Nurnberger; Kraev; M. Petkov (Atanasov 88), Panayotov (Antov 90+4), Milanov (Rusev 76), Kirilov (Krastev 76); Kolev (Ahmedov 76).
Belarus: Lapoukhov – Martynovich, Politevich, Polyakov (Zabelin 59); Karpovich, Bocherov (Yabloskiy 59), Ebong, Prishchepa (Kovalev 46); Gromyko (Antilevskiy 59), Lisakovich; Shikavka (Savitskiy 73).

Nov 18 – Luxembourg
Luxembourg 2 (Korac 72, Rodrigues 75)
Northern Ireland 2 (Price 19, Bradley 50)
Luxembourg: Pereira-Cardoso (Schon 74) – Korac, Carlson (M. Martins 82), Pinto (Olesen 56); Jans, Barreiro (Mahmutovic 56), C. Martins, Bohnert (Curci 74); Sinani, Moreira; Rodrigues.
Northern Ireland: P. Charles – Hume, Ballard, McConville; Bradley, McCann (Saville 76), S. Charles, Spencer; Galbraith (Smyth 89), Price (Devenny 90+2); D. Charles (Reid 76).

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
N. Ireland (P)	6	3	2	1	11	3	11
Bulgaria*	6	2	3	1	3	6	9
Belarus	6	1	4	1	3	4	7
Luxembourg**	6	0	3	3	3	7	3

**Enter promotion play-offs*
***Enter relegation play-offs*

Group C4

Nov 14 – Yerevan
Armenia 0
Faroe Islands 1 (Davidsen 33 pen)
Armenia: Cancarevic – Hamabardzumyan, Haroyan, Harutyunyan (Manvelyan 85), Tiknizyan; Sevikyan (Shaghoyan 46), Bichakhchyan, Iwu, Spertsyan, Miranyan (Ranos 46); Zelarayan.
Faroe Islands: Getsson – Danielsen, Faero, G. Vatnhamar, Edmundsson, Davidsen; Bjartalid (S. Vatnhamar 76), Joensen (Sorensen 62), Hendriksson Olsen (Mneney 76), Justinussen (Knudsen 68); Klettskard (M. Olsen 68).

Nov 14 – Skopje
North Macedonia 1 (Serafimov 57)
Latvia 0
North Macedonia: Dimitrievski – Dimoski (Mitrovski 59), Serafimov, Zajkov, Alioski (Ashkovski 78); Alimi, Bardhi; Churlinov (Ristovski 58), Trajkovski (Velkovski 78), Elmas (Qamili 24); Miovski.
Latvia: Matrevics – Savalnieks (Tobers 64), Jurkovskis, Cernomordijs, Jagodinskis, Ciganiks; Jaunzems (Melniks 64), Vapne (Varslavans 64), Zelenkovs, Daskevics (Uldrikis 71); Sits (Gutkovskis 71).

Nov 17 – Riga
Latvia 1 (Uldrikis 70)
Armenia 2 (Spertsyan 48, Miranyan 74)
Latvia: Matrevics – Jurkovskis (Krollis 76), Tobers (Vapne 82), Cernomordijs, Balodis, Ciganiks; Zelenkovs, Saveljevs (Savalnieks 67), Varslavans; Ikaunieks (Daskevics 67), Gutkovskis (Uldrikis 67).
Armenia: Cancarevic – Harutyunyan, Haroyan, Muradyan, Tiknizyan; Iwu, Udo (Manvelyan 46), Spertsyan; Bichakhchyan (Grigoryan 63), Ranos (Miranyan 63), Zelarayan (Calisir 84).

Nov 17 – Skopje
North Macedonia 1 (Miovski 62)
Faroe Islands 0
North Macedonia: Dimitrievski – Ilievski (Askovski 54), Serafimov, Zajkov, Alioski; Alimi, Atanasov; Churlinov (Qamili 54), Bardhi (Babunski 90+3), Trajkovski (Ristovski 54); Miovski (Velkovski 88).
Faroe Islands: a Reynatrodh – Faero, G. Vatnhamar, Edmundsson; Benjaminsen, Hansson (Joensen 58), Hendriksson Olsen (Justinussen 85), Davidsen; Sorensen (S. Vatnhamar 85), Knudsen (Klettskard 79), M. Olesen (Bjartalid 79).

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
N. Macedonia (P)	6	5	1	0	10	1	16
Armenia*	6	2	1	3	8	9	7
Faroe Islands	6	1	3	2	5	6	6
Latvia**	6	1	1	4	4	11	4

**Enter promotion play-offs*
***Enter relegation play-offs*

Group D1

Nov 15 – Serravalle
San Marino 1 (Nanni 90+2 pen)
Gibraltar 1 (Walker 11 pen)
San Marino: Colombo – G. Benvenuti (Fabbri 77), Cevoli, Rossi, T. Benvenuti (Tosi 77); A. Goluinucci; Berardi (Sensoli 77), Casadei (Zannoni 61), Lazzari (Giacopetti 72), Contadini; Nanni.
Gibraltar: Banda – Jolley, Lopes, Annesley, Olivero; Scanlon (Mouelhi 78), Torrilla, Pozo, Britto (Ronan 89); Walker; De Barr.

Nov 18 – Vaduz
Liechtenstein 1 (Sele 40)
San Marino 3 (Lazzari 46, Nanni 66 pen, A. Golinucci 76)
Liechtenstein: B. Buchel – Marxer (Schlegel 84), Wieser, Traber; S. Wolfinger (Zund 78), Meier (Kindle 70), M. Buchel (Kranz 71), Sele, Goppel; Saglam, Notaro (Ospelt 84).
San Marino: Colombo – Fabbri, Valentini, T. Benvenuti, Tosi; Contadini (Vitaioli 85), Zannoni (A. Golinucci 62), Mi. Battistini, Lazzari (Mularoni 75), Berardi (Sensoli 61); Nanni (Giacopetti 85).

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
San Marino (P)	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
Gibraltar*	4	1	3	0	4	3	6
Liechtenstein	4	0	2	2	3	6	2

**Enter promotion play-offs*

Group D2

Nov 16 – Andorra la Vella
Andorra 0
Moldova 1 (Postolachi 90+2)
Andorra: Alvarez – Borra (Dacu 77), Llovera, C. Garcia, Olivera (Pujol 89), San Nicolas; Cucu, Teixeira (Izquierdo 60), Vales (Guillen 59), Cervos; Sanchez (Fernandez 77).
Moldova: Celeadnic – Craciun, Baboglo, Mudrac; Platica, Caimacov, Rata, Motpan (Cojocaru 77), Reabciuk; Nicolaescu, Postolachi.

Nov 19 – Ta' Qali
Malta 0
Andorra 0
Malta: Bonello – Shaw, Mentz, Borg; J. Mbong, Guillaumier, Teuma (Pisani 90+1), Camenzuli (Beerman 34); Buhagiar (Tuma 46), P. Mbong (Satariano 46); Degabriele (Pepe 25).
Sent off: Mentz 17.
Andorra: Alvarez – Borra (Rubio 77), San Nicolas, C. Garcia, Olivera (Pomares 86), M. Garcia (Dacu 77); Fernandez (Cucu 63), Teixeira (Babot 63), Izquierdo, Cervos; Berto.

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Moldova (P)	4	3	0	1	5	1	9
Malta*	4	2	1	1	2	2	7
Andorra	4	0	1	3	0	4	1

**Enter promotion play-offs*

Finals Draw

Quarter-Finals

Mar 20:
Netherlands v Spain; Croatia v France; Denmark v Portugal; Italy v Germany

Mar 23:
Spain v Netherlands; France v Croatia; Portugal v Denmark; Germany v Italy

● *Semi-finals, third place play-off and final take place in June 2025*

Promotion-Relegation Play-Offs

League A v League B

Mar 20:
Turkey v Hungary; Ukraine v Belgium; Austria v Serbia; Greece v Scotland

Mar 23:
Hungary v Turkey; Belgium v Ukraine; Serbia v Austria; Scotland v Greece

League B v League C

Mar 20:
Kosovo v Iceland; Bulgaria v Republic of Ireland; Armenia v Georgia; Slovakia v Slovenia

Mar 23:
Iceland v Kosovo; Republic of Ireland v Bulgaria; Georgia v Armenia; Slovenia v Slovakia

League C v League D

Mar 26, 2026:
Gibraltar v Latvia; Malta v Luxembourg

Mar 31, 2026:
Latvia v Gibraltar; Luxembourg v Malta

2024-25 CONCACAF NATIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-Finals – 1st Leg

Nov 14 – San Jose
Costa Rica 0
Panama 1 (Fajardo 66 pen)
Costa Rica: Sequeira – Mitchell (Salinas 46), Cascante, J. Vargas (Gamboa 75), Calvo; K. Vargas (Rojas 75), Aguilera, Brenes (Bran 70), Madrigal; A. Martinez (Campbell 70), Ugalde.
Panama: Mosquera – Escobar, Farina, Cordoba, Blackman; Murillo, C. Martinez (Godoy 72), Carrasquilla (Harvey 77); Rodriguez (Lenis 88), Fajardo (Guerrero 77), Barcenas (Yanis 88).

Nov 14 – Kingston
Jamaica 0
United States 1 (Pepi 5)
Jamaica: Blake – Lembikisa (T. Gray 88), Holgate, Lowe, Bell, Leigh (Hayden 46); D. Gray (Cephas 46), Latibeaudiere, Palmer (Magee 58), Bailey; Nicholson (Williams 77).
Sent off: Holgate 86.
United States: Turner – Scally, McKenzie, Ream, A. Robinson; Cardoso (Tillman 21), Tessmann (Zendejas 87); Musah (Trusty 86), McKennie (Busio 72), Pulisic; Pepi (Vazquez 72).

Nov 15 – Paramaribo
Suriname 0
Canada 1 (Hoilett 82)
Suriname: Vaessen – Van Gelderen, Abena, Denswil, Haps; Malone (Pherai 85), Pinas (Dijksteel 69); Becker, Lonwijk (R. Vlijter 89), Van der Kust (Misidjan 69); G. Vlijter (Vente 69).
Canada: St Clair – Ahmed (Buchanan 78), Johnston, Waterman, Bombito, Laryea; Eustaquio (Choiniere 85), Kone (Osorio 61), Shaffelburg (Hoilett 78); Oluwaseyi (Larin 61), David.

Nov 15 – San Pedro Sula
Honduras 2 (Palma 64, 83)
Mexico 0
Honduras: Menjivar – Najar, Maldonado, L. Vega, Rosales; Rivas (C. Pineda 90+2), Flores, Lopez (Acosta 10, Palma 63), E. Rodriguez; J. Alvarez (Santos 90+2), Benguche (Arboleda 63).
Mexico: Ochoa – Sanchez, Reyes, Montes, Angulo; E. Alvarez, Chavez (Romo 58); Quinones (A. Vega 58), Jimenez (Martinez 77), Huerta; O. Pineda (Sepulveda 77).

Quarter-Finals – 2nd Leg

Nov 18 – Panama City
Panama 2 (Blackman 14, J. Rodriguez 45+3)
Costa Rica 2 (Bran 24, Martinez 73)
Panama win 3-2 on aggregate
Panama: Mosquera – Escobar, Farina, Cordoba, Blackman (Harvey 86); Murillo, C. Martinez (Ramos 85), Carrasquilla (Godoy 61); Rodriguez (Lenis 72), Fajardo (Guerrero 72), Barcenas.
Sent off: Escobar 80.
Costa Rica: Sequeira – Mitchell, Cascante, Bran, Calvo (Gamboa 46); K. Vargas, Aguilera (Leal 66), Brenes (Campbell 46), Madrigal (Contreras 73); Lassiter, Ugalde (A. Martinez 62).

Nov 18 – St Louis
United States 4 (Pulisic 14, Bernard 33 og, Pepi 42, Weah 56)
Jamaica 2 (D. Gray 53, 68)
United States win 5-2 on aggregate
United States: Turner – Scally, McKenzie, Ream, A. Robinson; McKennie (Busio 69), Tessmann; Musah (Zendejas 88), Pulisic (B. Aaronson 69), Weah (Cowell 78); Pepi (Vazquez 77).
Jamaica: Blake – T. Gray (Leigh 60), Lowe (Anderson 73), Bernard, Bell; Latibeaudiere, Hayden; Bailey (Williams 73), Magee (King 46), D. Gray; Nicholson (Cephas 60).

Nov 19 – Toronto
Canada 3 (David 23, Shaffelburg 30, 67)
Suriname 0
Canada win 4-0 on aggregate
Canada: St Clair – Johnston (Sigur 64), Bombito, Miller (Knight-Lebel 73), Laryea; Choiniere (Kone 64); Ahmed (Buchanan 74), Eustaquio, Shaffelburg (Hoilett 81); David, Larin (Bair 81).
Suriname: Vaessen – Van Gelderen, Abena, Denswil, Haps (Turfkruier 90+2); Malone, Pinas; Becker (Vente 75), Lonwijk (Adipi 90+2), Van der Kust (Misidjan 46); G. Vlijter (Conraad 46).

Nov 19 – Toluca
Mexico 4 (Jimenez 42, Martin 72, 90+7 pen, J. Sanchez 85)
Honduras 0
Mexico win 4-2 on aggregate
Mexico: Malagon – Huescas (J. Sanchez 66), Montes, Orozco, Gallardo; E. Alvarez, C. Rodriguez (Huerta 66); Gutierrez (Martin 66), Romo, A. Vega (O. Pineda 90+4); Jimenez (Chavez 89).
Honduras: Menjivar – Najar, Maldonado, L. Vega, Rosales; Arboleda (Castillo 77), Flores (Benguche 90+3), Arriaga, E. Rodriguez; J. Alvarez (Melendez 69), Palma (Obregon 46, Pinto 77).

Finals Draw

Semi-Finals

Mar 20:
United States v Panama; Canada v Mexico

● *Third place play-off and final on March 23*

League Phase

Group B1

Nov 14 – San Salvador
Montserrat 1 (Daniels 88)
St Vincent & Grenadines 2 (Pierre 42, Stewart 86 pen)

Nov 14 – San Salvador
Bonaire 0
El Salvador 1 (Vasquez 83)

Nov 17 – San Salvador
St Vincent & Grenadines 3 (Spring 19, 82, Edwards 67)
Bonaire 1 (Yorke 75 og)

Nov 17 – San Salvador
El Salvador 1 (Tejada 9)
Montserrat 0

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
El Salvador (P)	6	5	0	1	12	6	15
St Vincent & Gren*	6	4	1	1	12	7	13
Bonaire	6	1	1	4	4	8	4
Montserrat (R)	6	1	0	5	3	10	3

**Qualify for 2025 CONCACAF Gold Cup prelims*

Group B2

Nov 15 – Willemstad
Saint Lucia 0
Grenada 4 (Francis 50, Reg. Charles-Cook 56, Williams 74, Hippolyte 86)

Nov 15 – Willemstad
Saint Martin 0
Curacao 5 (Margaritha 24, 34, 54, 80, J. Bacuna 78 pen)

Nov 18 – Willemstad
Grenada 0
Saint Martin 3 (Denis 39, Lebon 87, 90+3)

Nov 18 – Willemstad
Curacao 4 (Kastaneer 27, 30, J. Bacuna 73, 79)
Saint Lucia 1 (Charles 29)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Curacao (P)	6	4	1	1	15	3	13
Saint Lucia	6	3	0	3	7	15	9
Grenada	6	2	1	3	7	6	7
Saint Martin (R)	6	2	0	4	8	13	6

Group B3

Nov 15 – Mayaguez
Puerto Rico 5 (Rivera 8, Hernandez 23, Rios 55, Servania 62, A. Diaz 81)
Aruba 1 (Jimenez 22)

Nov 15 – Mayaguez
Sint Maarten 0
Haiti 8 (Attys 2, Pierrot 14, 25, 52, Lacroix 19, Nazon 49, 58 pen, Prunier 67)

Nov 18 – Mayaguez
Aruba 0
Sint Maarten 1 (Illidge 90)

Nov 18 – Mayaguez
Haiti 3 (Attys 29, Louicius 53, Pierrot 70)
Puerto Rico 0

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Haiti (P)	6	6	0	0	29	5	18
Puerto Rico	6	3	0	3	11	12	9
Sint Maarten	6	3	0	3	7	18	9
Aruba	6	0	0	6	5	17	0

Group B4

Nov 16 – Santiago
Bermuda 2 (Drew 8 og, Lambe 48)
Antigua & Barbuda 1 (Massicot 69)

Nov 16 – Santiago
Dominica 1 (Joseph 30)
Dominican Republic 6 (Romero 13, 65, Morschel 37, 49, Mata 68, Paniagua 90+5 pen)

Nov 19 – Santiago
Antigua & Barbuda 0
Dominica 0

Nov 19 – Santiago
Dominican Republic 6 (Romero 33, 69, 90, 90+4, J. Lopez 75, Morschel 87)
Bermuda 1 (Parfitt 45+2)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dominican Rep (P)	6	6	0	0	27	4	18
Bermuda*	6	4	0	2	15	13	12
Dominica	6	1	1	4	6	18	4
Antigua & Bar (R)	6	0	1	5	2	15	1

**Qualify for 2025 CONCACAF Gold Cup prelims*

Play-Ins – 1st Leg

Nov 14 – Basseterre
St Kitts & Nevis 2 (Sawyers 8, Burley 48)
Cuba 1 (Paradela 40)

Nov 14 – Belmopan
Belize 2 (Bernardez 67 pen, Martinez 75)
French Guiana 1 (Torvic 90+3)

Nov 15 – George Town
Cayman Islands 0
Guadeloupe 6 (Mirval 12, Leborgne 37, Plumain 41, Tille 64, Mixtur 71, Owens 90 og)

Nov 15 – Bridgetown
Barbados 1 (Reid-Stephen 17)
Guyana 4 (Glasgow 26, 59, De Rosario 60, George 90+2)

Play-Ins – 2nd Leg

Nov 18 – Santiago de Cuba
Cuba 4 (Hernandez 40, Piedra 45+3, Paradela 50, Reyes 87 pen)
St Kitts & Nevis 0
Cuba win 5-2 on aggregate

Nov 19 – Paramaribo
French Guiana 2 (Nozile 48, Haabo 89 pen)
Belize 2 (Lopez 40, Bernardez 52)
Belize win 4-3 on aggregate

Nov 19 – Le Gosier
Guadeloupe 1 (Tille 86)
Cayman Islands 0
Guadeloupe win 7-0 on aggregate

Nov 19 – Leonora
Guyana 5 (De Rosario 27, 41, 45+2, Glasgow 57, Brathwaite 90+5 og)
Barbados 3 (Gale 49, 67, Reid-Stephen 63)
Guyana win 9-4 on aggregate

● *Winners qualify for 2025 CONCACAF Gold Cup Prelims*

2025 CONCACAF GOLD CUP

Prelims Draw

Costa Rica v Belize; Jamaica v St Vincent & Grenadines; Honduras v Bermuda; Guatemala v Guyana; Trinidad & Tobago v Cuba; Martinique v Suriname; Nicaragua v Guadeloupe

● *Two-legged fixtures take place March 2025. Winners qualify for 2025 CONCACAF Gold Cup, joining Canada, Mexico, United States, Curacao, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, Panama and one nation from outside CONCACAF*

AFCON 2025 QUALIFYING

Group A

Nov 14 – Pretoria
Madagascar 2 (Memmiche 20 og, Amada 45+1)
Tunisia 3 (Rafia 6, Ltaief 40, Abdi 90+3)

Nov 15 – Berkane
Gambia 1 (Jatta 18)
Comoros 2 (Said 25, Maolida 90)

Nov 18 – Tunis
Tunisia 0
Gambia 1 (Ceesay 17)

Nov 18 – Al Hoceima
Comoros 1 (Bourhane 47)
Madagascar 0

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Comoros (Q)	6	3	3	0	7	4	12
Tunisia (Q)	6	3	1	2	7	6	10
Gambia	6	2	2	2	6	6	8
Madagascar	6	0	2	4	4	8	2

Group B

Nov 14 – Bloemfontein
Lesotho 1 (Mokhachane 51)
Central African Republic 0

Nov 15 – Franceville
Gabon 1 (Bouanga 4)
Morocco 5 (Harkass 17, Brahim 20, 23, En-Nesyri 81, Saibari 90)

Nov 18 – Oujda
Morocco 7 (Brahim 5, 15, 42, Rahimi 37, 45+2 pen, En-Nesyri 68, Saibari 70)
Lesotho 0

Nov 18 – Johannesburg
Central African Republic 0
Gabon 1 (Kanga 74 pen)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco (Q)	6	6	0	0	26	2	18
Gabon (Q)	6	3	1	2	7	9	10
Lesotho	6	1	1	4	2	13	4
Central African Rep	6	1	0	5	3	14	3

Group C

Nov 15 – Francistown
Botswana 1 (Baruti 18)
Mauritania 1 (Koita 7)

Nov 15 – Praia
Cape Verde 1 (Mendes 63 pen)
Egypt 1 (Mohamed 31)

Nov 19 – Cairo
Egypt 1 (Trezeguet 15)
Botswana 1 (Kebatho 8)

Nov 19 – Nouakchott
Mauritania 1 (Soueid 45+4)
Cape Verde 0

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt (Q)	6	4	2	0	12	2	14
Botswana (Q)	6	2	2	2	4	7	8
Mauritania	6	2	1	3	3	6	7
Cape Verde	6	1	1	4	3	7	4

Group D

Nov 14 – Kigali
Rwanda 0
Libya 1 (Saad Mohamed 84)

Nov 14 – Abidjan
Benin 1 (Tijani 16)
Nigeria 1 (Osimhen 81)

Nov 18 – Uyo
Nigeria 1 (Chukwueze 59)
Rwanda 2 (Mutsinzi 72, Nshuti 75)

Nov 18 – Tripoli
Libya 0
Benin 0

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria (Q)	6	3	2	1	9	3	11
Benin (Q)	6	2	2	2	7	7	8
Rwanda	6	2	2	2	5	7	8
Libya	6	1	2	3	3	7	5

Group E

Nov 13 – Monrovia
Liberia 1 (Sangare 83 pen)
Togo 0

Nov 14 – Malabo
Equatorial Guinea 0
Algeria 0

Nov 17 – Tizi Ouzou
Algeria 5 (Mandi 20, Mahrez 29, Bounedjah 64, Gouiri 74, Amoura 90+5)
Liberia 1 (Dweh 6)

Nov 17 – Lome
Togo 3 (Annor 29, 87, Denkey 53)
Equatorial Guinea 0

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria (Q)	6	5	1	0	16	2	16
Eq. Guinea (Q)	6	2	2	2	5	8	8
Togo	6	1	2	3	7	10	5
Liberia	6	1	1	4	4	12	4

Group F

Nov 14 – Lome
Niger 4 (Sosah 6, 45+3 pen, Oumarou 29, Badamassi 51)
Sudan 0

Nov 15 – Talatona
Angola 1 (Zini 64)
Ghana 1 (J. Ayew 18)

Nov 18 – Accra
Ghana 1 (Afriyie 67)
Niger 2 (Badamassi 22, Sako 90+2)

Nov 18 – Benghazi
Sudan 0
Angola 0

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Angola (Q)	6	4	2	0	7	2	14
Sudan (Q)	6	2	2	2	4	6	8
Niger	6	2	1	3	7	6	7
Ghana	6	0	3	3	3	7	3

Group G

Nov 13 – Abidjan
Chad 1 (Thiam 31 pen)
Sierra Leone 1 (Dumbuya 29)

Nov 15 – Ndola
Zambia 1 (K. Musonda 43)
Ivory Coast 0

Nov 19 – Abidjan
Ivory Coast 4 (Bayo 25, Adingra 37, Agbadou 77, Diakite 90+3)
Chad 0

Nov 19 – Monrovia
Sierra Leone 0
Zambia 2 (Banda 54, K. Musonda 71)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zambia (Q)	6	4	1	1	7	4	13
Ivory Coast (Q)	6	4	0	2	12	3	12
Sierra Leone	6	1	2	3	5	10	5
Chad	6	0	3	3	1	8	3

Group H

Nov 16 – Kinshasa
Ethiopia 0
Tanzania 2 (Msuva 15, Salum 31)

Nov 16 – Abidjan
Guinea 1 (Guirassy 90+2)
DR Congo 0

Nov 19 – Kinshasa
DR Congo 1 (Batubinsika 90+2)
Ethiopia 2 (Desta 36, Nasir 90+6)

Nov 19 – Dar es Salaam
Tanzania 1 (Msuva 61)
Guinea 0

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
DR Congo (Q)	6	4	0	2	7	3	12
Tanzania (Q)	6	3	1	2	5	4	10
Guinea	6	3	0	3	9	5	9
Ethiopia	6	1	1	4	3	12	4

Group I

Nov 15 – Mbombela
Eswatini 1 (Mkhonta 81 pen)
Guinea-Bissau 1 (Mane 87)

Nov 15 – Maputo
Mozambique 0
Mali 1 (Doumbia 19)

Nov 19 – Bamako
Mali 6 (Toure 7, Nene 17, 23, 76, Doumbia 42, 89)
Eswatini 0

Nov 19 – Bissau
Guinea-Bissau 1 (Beto 42)
Mozambique 2 (Langa 9, Ratifo 52)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mali (Q)	6	4	2	0	10	1	14
Mozambique (Q)	6	3	2	1	9	5	11
Guinea-Bissau	6	1	2	3	4	6	5
Eswatini	6	0	2	4	2	13	2

Group J

Nov 13 – Johannesburg
Namibia 0
Cameroon 0

Nov 15 – Polokwane
Zimbabwe 1 (Maswanhise 32)
Kenya 1 (Ayunga 52)

Nov 19 – Yaounde
Cameroon 2 (Aboubakar 18, Nkoudou 23)
Zimbabwe 1 (Dzvukamanja 73)

Nov 19 – Polokwane
Kenya 0
Namibia 0

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cameroon (Q)	6	4	2	0	8	2	14
Zimbabwe (Q)	6	2	3	1	6	4	9
Kenya	6	1	3	2	4	7	6
Namibia	6	0	2	4	2	7	2

Group K

Nov 14 – Juba
South Sudan 3 (Ezibon 31, 45+2, Elly 84)
Congo 2 (Ibayi 26, 35)

Nov 15 – Kampala
Uganda 0
South Africa 2 (Morena 49, Maswanganyi 89)

Nov 19 – Cape Town
South Africa 3 (Rayners 7, Maswanganyi 22, Mokoena 50 pen)
South Sudan 0

Nov 19 – Brazzaville
Congo 0
Uganda 1 (Mutyaba 55)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Africa (Q)	6	4	2	0	16	5	14
Uganda (Q)	6	4	1	1	8	5	13
Congo	6	1	1	4	4	12	4
South Sudan	6	1	0	5	6	12	3

Group L

Nov 14 – Abidjan
Burundi 0
Malawi 0

Nov 14 – Bamako
Burkina Faso 0
Senegal 1 (Diarra 83)

Nov 18 – Lilongwe
Malawi 3 (Mhango 28, Mbulu 57, Aaron 62)
Burkina Faso 0

Nov 19 – Dakar
Senegal 2 (Diarra 35, 51)
Burundi 0

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal (Q)	6	5	1	0	10	1	16
Burkina Faso (Q)	6	3	1	2	10	7	10
Burundi	6	1	1	4	4	11	4
Malawi	6	1	1	4	6	11	4

FRIENDLIES

Nov 13 – Dhaka
Bangladesh 0
Maldives 1 (Fasir 18)

Nov 13 – Dushanbe
Tajikistan 4 (Mabatshoev 19, 44, A. Dzhalilov 29, 50)
Nepal 0

Nov 14 – Hong Kong
Hong Kong 3 (Orr 44, 90+6, Everton 83)
Philippines 1 (Kristensen 48)

Nov 14 – Singapore
Singapore 3 (Farhan 5, Shawal 84, Naqiuddin 86)
Myanmar 2 (Ye Yint Aung 46, Thiha Zaw 51)

Nov 14 – Bangkok
Laos 1 (Souvanny 34)
Malaysia 3 (Harith 6, Wilkin 64 pen, Aguero 83 pen)

Nov 14 – Ta' Qali
Malta 2 (Degabriele 51, B. Buchel 54 og)
Liechtenstein 0

Nov 14 – Pathum Thani
Thailand 0
Lebanon 0

Nov 15 – Krasnodar
Russia 11 (Oblyakov 1, 28, Othman 7 og, Morozov 9, Sadulaev 48, Krivtsov 57, Musaev 62, Mostovoy 67, Chernikov 73, Batrakov 79, Adamov 87)
Brunei 0

Nov 16 – Dushanbe
Nepal 2 (Karki 46, Chand 78)
Afghanistan 0

Nov 16 – Dhaka
Bangladesh 2 (Jony 43, Papon 90+4)
Maldives 1 (Fasir 23)

Nov 17 – Pathum Thani
Thailand 1 (Seksan 60)
Laos 1 (Bounkong 69)

Nov 18 – Hyderabad
India 1 (Bheke 39)
Malaysia 1 (Paulo Josue 19)

Nov 18 – Singapore
Singapore 2 (Irfan 86, Shawal 90+3)
Chinese Taipei 3 (Tiao 22, Sandberg 79, Kouame 90+1)

Nov 19 – Volgograd
Russia 4 (Osipenko 33, 81 pen, Samoshnikov 52, Al. Miranchuk 66)
Syria 0

Nov 19 – Gibraltar
Gibraltar 1 (Walker 68 pen)
Moldova 1 (Mudrac 40)

Nov 19 – Yangon
Myanmar 2 (Thiha Zaw 42, Maung Maung Lwin 57)
Lebanon 3 (Fakhro 37, Merheg 75, 84)

Nov 19 – Hong Kong
Hong Kong 1 (Everton 11)
Mauritius 0

Nov 19 – Dushanbe
Tajikistan 3 (Juraboev 11, Samiev 27, Soirov 70)
Afghanistan 1 (Asekzai 37)

26TH ARABIAN GULF CUP

Fixtures

Group A

Dec 21:
Kuwait v Oman; Qatar v United Arab Emirates
Dec 24:
Oman v Qatar; United Arab Emirates v Kuwait
Dec 27:
Kuwait v Qatar; United Arab Emirates v Oman

Group B

Dec 22:
Iraq v Yemen; Saudi Arabia v Bahrain
Dec 25:
Bahrain v Iraq; Yemen v Saudi Arabia
Dec 28:
Iraq v Saudi Arabia; Bahrain v Yemen

● *Knockout stages take place December 31, 2024 to January 3, 2025*

Club Football

EUROPE

2024-25 UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Matchday 5

Nov 26 – Prague
Sparta Prague (Cze) 0
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 6 (Alvarez 15, 59, Llorente 43, Griezmann 70, Correa 85, 89)

Nov 26 – Bratislava
Slovan Bratislava (Svk) 2 (Barseghyan 24, Marcelli 88)
Milan (Ita) 3 (Pulisic 21, Leao 68, Abraham 71)

Nov 26 – Leverkusen
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 5 (Wirtz 8 pen, 30, Grimaldo 11, Schick 61, Garcia 72)
Red Bull Salzburg (Aut) 0

Nov 26 – Bern
Young Boys (Sui) 1 (Ganvoula 11)
Atalanta (Ita) 6 (Retegui 9, 39, De Ketelaere 28, 56, Kolasinac 32, Samardzic 90)

Nov 26 – Barcelona
Barcelona (Spa) 3 (Lewandowski 10 pen, 90+2, Olmo 66)
Brest (Fra) 0

Nov 26 – Munich
Bayern Munich (Ger) 1 (Kim Min-jae 38)
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 0

Nov 26 – Milan
Internazionale (Ita) 1 (Lukeba 27 og)
RB Leipzig (Ger) 0

Nov 26 – Manchester
Manchester City (Eng) 3 (Haaland 44 pen, 53, Gundogan 50)
Feyenoord (Ned) 3 (Hadj Moussa 75, Gimenez 82, Hancko 89)

Nov 26 – Lisbon
Sporting (Por) 1 (Inacio 47)
Arsenal (Eng) 5 (Martinelli 7, Havertz 22, Gabriel 45+1, Saka 65 pen, Trossard 82)

Nov 27 – Belgrade
Red Star Belgrade (Srb) 5 (Silas 12, Krunic 31, Ivanic 65, Radonjic 69, 88)
Stuttgart (Ger) 1 (Demirovic 5)

Nov 27 – Klagenfurt
Sturm Graz (Aut) 1 (Biereth 59)
Girona (Spa) 0

Nov 27 – Monaco
Monaco (Fra) 2 (Ben Seghir 13, Magassa 67)
Benfica (Por) 3 (Pavlidis 48, Cabral 84, Amdouni 88)

Nov 27 – Birmingham
Aston Villa (Eng) 0
Juventus (Ita) 0

Nov 27 – Bologna
Bologna (Ita) 1 (Lucumi 63)
Lille (Fra) 2 (Mukau 44, 66)

Nov 27 – Glasgow
Celtic (Sco) 1 (Maeda 60)
Club Brugge (Bel) 1 (Carter-Vickers 26 og)

Nov 27 – Zagreb
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 0
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 3 (Gittens 41, Bensebaini 56, Guirassy 90)

Nov 27 – Liverpool
Liverpool (Eng) 2 (Mac Allister 52, Gakpo 77)
Real Madrid (Spa) 0

Nov 27 – Eindhoven
PSV (Ned) 3 (Tillman 87, 90, Pepi 90+5)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 2 (Sikan 8, Zubkov 37)

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	5	5	0	0	12	1	15
Inter	5	4	1	0	7	0	13
Barcelona	5	4	0	1	18	5	12
B. Dortmund	5	4	0	1	16	6	12
Atalanta	5	3	2	0	11	1	11
B. Leverkusen	5	3	1	1	11	5	10
Arsenal	5	3	1	1	8	2	10
Monaco	5	3	1	1	12	7	10
Aston Villa	5	3	1	1	6	1	10
Sporting	5	3	1	1	10	7	10
Brest	5	3	1	1	9	6	10
Lille	5	3	1	1	7	5	10
Bayern Munich	5	3	0	2	12	7	9
Benfica	5	3	0	2	10	7	9
Atletico Madrid	5	3	0	2	11	9	9
Milan	5	3	0	2	10	8	9
Man City	5	2	2	1	13	7	8
PSV	5	2	2	1	10	7	8
Juventus	5	2	2	1	7	5	8
Celtic	5	2	2	1	10	10	8
Feyenoord	5	2	1	2	10	13	7
Club Brugge	5	2	1	2	4	7	7
Dinamo Zagreb	5	2	1	2	10	15	7
Real Madrid	5	2	0	3	9	9	6
PSG	5	1	1	3	3	6	4
Shakhtar Donetsk	5	1	1	3	4	8	4
Stuttgart	5	1	1	3	4	11	4
Sparta Prague	5	1	1	3	5	14	4
Sturm Graz	5	1	0	4	2	6	3
Girona	5	1	0	4	4	9	3
Red Star Belgrade	5	1	0	4	9	17	3
RB Salzburg	5	1	0	4	3	15	3
Bologna	5	0	1	4	1	7	1
RB Leipzig	5	0	0	5	4	10	0
Slovan Bratislava	5	0	0	5	4	18	0
Young Boys	5	0	0	5	2	17	0

2024-25 EUROPA LEAGUE

Matchday 5

Nov 28 – Bilbao
Athletic Club (Spa) 3 (Boiro 6, Prados 24, Guruzeta 54)
Elfsborg (Swe) 0

Nov 28 – Alkmaar
AZ (Ned) 1 (Mijnans 2)
Galatasaray (Tur) 1 (Osimhen 43)

Nov 28 – Istanbul
Besiktas (Tur) 1 (Rafa Silva 38)
Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr) 3 (Kanichowsky 23, Dor Peretz 45+3, Patati 81)

Nov 28 – Hamburg
Dynamo Kyiv (Ukr) 1 (Kabayev 90+5)
Viktoria Plzen (Cze) 2 (Vydra 55, Sulc 90)

Nov 28 – Riga
RFS (Lva) 0
PAOK (Gre) 2 (Despodov 2, Chalov 59)

Nov 28 – Baku
Qarabag (Aze) 1 (Juninho 88 pen)
Lyon (Fra) 4 (Mikautadze 15, 80, Tolisso 63, Fofana 68)

Nov 28 – Brussels
Anderlecht (Bel) 2 (Degreef 52, Amuzu 86)
Porto (Por) 2 (Galeno 24 pen, Vieira 83)

Nov 28 – Rome
Lazio (Ita) 0
Ludogorets (Bul) 0

Nov 28 – Herning
Midtjylland (Den) 1 (Collins 48 og)
Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger) 2 (Larsson 7, Marmoush 57 pen)

Nov 28 – Enschede
Twente (Ned) 0
Union Saint-Gilloise (Bel) 1 (Fuseini 11)

Nov 28 – Bucharest
FCSB (Rou) 0
Olympiacos (Gre) 0

Nov 28 – Budapest
Ferencvaros (Hun) 4 (B. Varga 8 pen, 11, Malinowski 53, Cisse 74)
Malmo (Swe) 1 (Botheim 18 pen)

Nov 28 – Manchester
Manchester United (Eng) 3 (Garnacho 1, Hojlund 45, 50)
Bodo/Glimt (Nor) 2 (Evjen 19, Zinckernage 23)

Nov 28 – Nice
Nice (Fra) 1 (Bouanani 83)
Rangers (Sco) 4 (Cerny 35, Diomande 38, Igamane 45+3, 54)

Nov 28 – San Sebastian
Real Sociedad (Spa) 2 (Barrentexea 67, Kubo 85)
Ajax (Ned) 0

Nov 28 – Braga
Braga (Por) 3 (Bruma 2, Fernandes 8, Carvalho 90+5)
Hoffenheim (Ger) 0

Nov 28 – Prague
Slavia Prague (Cze) 1 (Chory 7)
Fenerbahce (Tur) 2 (Dzeko 35, En-Nesyri 85)

Nov 28 – London
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) 2 (Son Heung-min 5 pen, Johnson 33)
Roma (Ita) 2 (Ndicka 20, Hummels 90+1)

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lazio	5	4	1	0	11	2	13
Athletic Club	5	4	1	0	9	2	13
E. Frankfurt	5	4	1	0	10	5	13
Galatasaray	5	3	2	0	13	9	11
Anderlecht	5	3	2	0	9	5	11
Ajax	5	3	1	1	13	3	10
Lyon	5	3	1	1	12	5	10
Rangers	5	3	1	1	12	6	10
Tottenham	5	3	1	1	10	6	10
FCSB	5	3	1	1	7	5	10
Ferencvaros	5	3	0	2	11	5	9
Man United	5	2	3	0	10	7	9
Viktoria Plzen	5	2	3	0	9	7	9
Olympiakos	5	2	2	1	5	3	8
Fenerbahce	5	2	2	1	7	7	8
Real Sociedad	5	2	1	2	7	6	7
Bodo/Glimt	5	2	1	2	8	8	7
Braga	5	2	1	2	7	7	7
AZ	5	2	1	2	7	7	7
Midtjylland	5	2	1	2	5	5	7
Roma	5	1	3	1	5	5	6
Besiktas	5	2	0	3	5	11	6
Porto	5	1	2	2	10	10	5
Union SG	5	1	2	2	3	4	5
Hoffenheim	5	1	2	2	5	8	5
Slavia Prague	5	1	1	3	4	5	4
PAOK	5	1	1	3	5	8	4
Elfsborg	5	1	1	3	7	11	4
Twente	5	0	3	2	4	7	3
Malmo	5	1	0	4	4	10	3
Maccabi Tel Aviv	5	1	0	4	5	12	3
Qarabag	5	1	0	4	4	13	3
Ludogorets	5	0	2	3	1	6	2
RFS	5	0	2	3	4	10	2
Nice	5	0	2	3	5	12	2
Dynamo Kyiv	5	0	0	5	1	12	0

2024-25 CONFERENCE LEAGUE

Matchday 4

Nov 27 – Istanbul
Istanbul Basaksehir (Tur) 1 (Piatek 42 pen)
Petrocub Hincesti (And) 1 (Bors 90+6)

Nov 28 – Almaty
Astana (Kaz) 1 (Kalaica 40)
Vitoria Guimaraes (Por) 1 (Ramirez 89)

Nov 28 – Heidenheim
Heidenheim (Ger) 0
Chelsea (Eng) 2 (Nkunku 51, Mudryk 86)

Nov 28 – Brugge
Cercle Brugge (Bel) 2 (Efekele 40, Magnee 90)
Hearts (Sco) 0

Nov 28 – Sumgayit
Dinamo Minsk (Blr) 1 (Adeola 13)
Copenhagen (Den) 2 (Elyounoussi 6, Diks 55 pen)

Nov 28 – Yerevan
Noah (Arm) 0
Vikingur Reykjavik (Isl) 0

Nov 28 – St Gallen
St Gallen (Sui) 2 (Cisse 31, Konietzke 65)
TSC Backa Topola (Srb) 2 (Pantovic 40, 53)

Nov 28 – Banja Luka
Borac Banja Luka (Bih) 2 (Despotovic 82, Skorup 89)
LASK (Aut) 1 (Berisha 51)

Nov 28 – Molde
Molde (Nor) 0
APOEL (Cyp) 1 (Laifis 41)

Nov 28 – Celje
Celje (Svn) 3 (Zec 7, Nieto 54, Dieguez 80 og)
Jagiellonia Bialystok (Pol) 3 (Pululu 34, Imaz 71, Hansen 78)

Nov 28 – Athens
Panathinaikos (Gre) 1 (Toivio 33 og)
HJK (Fin) 0

Nov 28 – Shrewsbury
The New Saints (Wal) 0
Djurgarden (Swe) 1 (Gulliksen 41)

Nov 28 – Florence
Fiorentina (Ita) 3 (Kouame 38, Goldar 53 og, Martinez Quarta 72)
Pafos (Cyp) 2 (Jairo 68, Jaja 87)

Nov 28 – Thun
Lugano (Sui) 2 (Mahou 6, Doumbia 86)
Gent (Bel) 0

Nov 28 – Mlada Boleslav
Mlada Boleslav (Cze) 2 (Vojta 51, Vydra 54)
Real Betis (Spa) 1 (Lo Celso 17)

Nov 28 – Ljubljana
Olimpija Ljubljana (Svn) 1 (Durdov 67)
Larne (Nir) 0

Nov 28 – Nicosia
Omonia (Cyp) 0
Legia Warsaw (Pol) 3 (Morishita 17, Szczepaniak 77, Wszolek 86)

Nov 28 – Vienna
Rapid Vienna (Aut) 1 (Cvetkovic 9)
Shamrock Rovers (Irl) 1 (Kenny 55)

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chelsea	4	4	0	0	18	3	12
Legia Warsaw	4	4	0	0	11	0	12
Jagiellonia Bialystok	4	3	1	0	10	4	10
Rapid Vienna	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
Vitoria Guimaraes	4	3	1	0	8	4	10
Fiorentina	4	3	0	1	10	6	9
Olimpija Ljubljana	4	3	0	1	6	2	9
Lugano	4	3	0	1	7	4	9
Heidenheim	4	3	0	1	5	3	9
Shamrock Rovers	4	2	2	0	8	4	8
Cercle Brugge	4	2	1	1	9	5	7
Djurgarden	4	2	1	1	6	5	7
APOEL	4	2	1	1	4	3	7
Vikingur Reykjavik	4	2	1	1	5	5	7
Borac Banja Luka	4	2	1	1	4	4	7
Pafos	4	2	0	2	7	5	6
Hearts	4	2	0	2	4	5	6
Gent	4	2	0	2	5	7	6
Copenhagen	4	1	2	1	6	6	5
Celje	4	1	1	2	10	9	4
TSC Backa Topola	4	1	1	2	6	7	4
Real Betis	4	1	1	2	4	5	4
Astana	4	1	1	2	2	4	4
Panathinaikos	4	1	1	2	4	7	4
St Gallen	4	1	1	2	8	13	4
Noah	4	1	1	2	2	9	4
Molde	4	1	0	3	4	6	3
Omonia	4	1	0	3	4	6	3
The New Saints	4	1	0	3	3	5	3
Mlada Boleslav	4	1	0	3	3	6	3
HJK	4	1	0	3	1	6	3
LASK	4	0	2	2	3	6	2
Istanbul Basaksehir	4	0	2	2	5	10	2
Petrocub Hincesti	4	0	1	3	2	10	1
Dinamo Minsk	4	0	0	4	2	9	0
Larne	4	0	0	4	2	10	0

BELARUS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo Minsk (C)	30	20	8	2	50	13	68
Neman Grodno	30	20	5	5	45	19	65
Torpedo-BelAZ	30	18	8	4	45	21	62
Dynamo Brest	30	14	7	9	62	37	49
Vitebsk	30	14	5	11	33	25	47
Gomel	30	11	11	8	37	28	44
Isloch	30	11	8	11	36	30	41
BATE Borisov	30	11	7	12	38	38	40
Slutsk	30	11	6	13	26	41	39
Arsenal Dzerzhinsk	30	10	8	12	29	36	38
Slavia Mozyr	30	8	11	11	28	33	35
Smorgon	30	7	11	12	33	51	32
Minsk	30	6	10	14	28	44	28
Naftan*	30	5	11	14	27	44	26
Dnepr Mogilev (R)	30	3	9	18	27	58	18
Shakhtyor Soligorsk** (R)	30	5	7	18	19	45	2

*Won promotion-relegation play-off against Niva Dolbizno 5-1 on aggregate
**Deducted 20 points

ESTONIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FCI Levadia (C)	36	27	6	3	82	19	87
Nomme Kalju	36	21	9	6	79	44	72
Paide Linnameeskond	36	23	3	10	74	39	72
Flora	36	21	7	8	69	43	70
Tammeka	36	11	9	16	47	54	42
Narva Trans	36	10	12	14	48	63	42
Vaprus	36	9	8	19	35	57	35
Kuressaare	36	8	10	18	46	67	34
Tallinna Kalev*	36	8	7	21	37	74	31
Nomme United (R)	36	2	9	25	22	79	15

*Won promotion-relegation play-off against Vlimsi 2-1 on aggregate after extra-time

FAROE ISLANDS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vikingur (C)	27	24	1	2	79	14	73
KI	27	22	1	4	58	24	67
HB	27	19	2	6	55	23	59
NSI Runavik	27	13	3	11	54	43	42
B36 Torshavn	27	11	8	8	56	42	41
07 Vestur	27	9	3	15	34	60	30
EB/Streymur	27	9	1	17	35	49	28
B68 Toftir	27	5	6	16	23	48	21
Skala (R)	27	5	5	17	27	57	20
IF (R)	27	1	4	22	24	85	7

FINLAND

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
KuPS (C)	27	17	5	5	46	24	56
Ilves	27	16	6	5	56	27	54
HJK	27	13	6	8	44	27	45
SJK	27	11	7	9	46	44	40
VPS	27	11	6	10	43	45	39
Haka	27	11	5	11	40	43	38

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter Turku	27	12	5	10	46	34	41
Gnistan	27	10	7	10	40	43	37
Oulu	27	7	7	13	32	40	28
Mariehamn	27	7	5	15	27	44	26
Lahti* (R)	27	4	12	11	31	47	24
EIF (R)	27	4	7	16	24	57	19

*Lost promotion-relegation play-off against Jaro 2-1 on aggregate

Conference League Play-Offs

Quarter-Finals

Oct 23:
Haka 2-1 Inter Turku (*AET*); VPS 0-1 Gnistan

Semi-Final

Oct 26:
Haka 3-3 Gnistan (*AET, Haka win 4-3 on pens*)

Final

Oct 30:
Haka 1-2 SJK
Nov 2:
SJK 2-2 Haka (agg 4-3)

GEORGIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iberia 1999 (C)	36	23	6	7	74	46	75
Torpedo Kutaisi	36	21	7	8	58	40	70
Dila Gori	36	19	11	6	58	30	68
Dinamo Batumi	36	15	10	11	42	41	55
Samgurali Tsqaltubo	36	11	11	14	51	49	44
Kolkheti-1913	36	9	14	13	48	58	41
Dinamo Tbilisi	36	9	12	15	33	44	39
Gagra*	36	11	5	20	36	53	38
Telavi*	36	8	10	18	32	43	34
Samtredia (R)	36	5	12	19	33	61	27

*Enter promotion-relegation play-offs against Sioni Bolnisi and Rustavi respectively

ICELAND

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Breidablik (C)	27	19	5	3	63	31	62
Vikingur Reykjavik	27	18	5	4	68	33	59
Valur	27	12	8	7	66	42	44
Stjarnan	27	12	6	9	51	43	42
IA	27	11	4	12	49	47	37
FH	27	9	7	11	43	50	34

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
KA	27	10	7	10	44	48	37
KR	27	9	7	11	56	49	34
Fram	27	8	6	13	38	49	30
Vestri	27	6	7	14	32	53	25
HK (R)	27	7	4	16	34	71	25
Fylkir (R)	27	5	6	16	32	60	21

KAZAKHSTAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kairat (C)	24	14	5	5	39	21	47
Astana	24	14	4	6	39	19	46
Aktobe	24	12	7	5	39	26	43
Ordabasy	24	12	6	6	36	24	42
Tobol	24	11	6	7	33	23	39
Elimai	24	10	7	7	35	32	37
Atyrau	24	9	8	7	28	20	35
Kaisar	24	9	7	8	28	29	34
Kyzylzhar	24	8	5	11	29	26	29
Zhenis	24	6	6	12	18	32	24
Zhetysu	24	5	8	11	17	33	23
Turan Turkistan	24	5	5	14	16	39	20
Shakhter Karagandy (R)	24	2	4	18	12	45	10

LATVIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
RFS (C)	36	29	3	4	103	25	90
Riga	36	27	6	3	99	23	87
Auda	36	18	6	12	63	34	60
Valmiera*	36	19	7	10	75	39	55
Daugavpils	36	11	9	16	43	60	42
Liepaja	36	10	9	17	37	56	39
Metta	36	10	6	20	34	76	36
Tukums	36	9	8	19	38	81	35
Grobina**	36	8	5	23	34	78	29
Jelgava (R)	36	6	7	23	28	82	25

*Deducted 9 points
**Won promotion-relegation play-off against JDFS Alberts 4-3 on aggregate

LITHUANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zalgiris (C)	36	24	7	5	76	31	79
Hegelmann	36	19	10	7	60	40	67
Kauno Zalgiris	36	15	9	12	43	40	54
Dainava	36	12	9	15	33	40	45
Banga	36	10	13	13	37	46	43
Dziugas Telsiai	36	11	9	16	33	48	42
Siauliai	36	10	12	14	39	50	42
Panevezys	36	9	14	13	34	40	41
Suduva*	36	9	12	15	33	38	39
TransINVEST (R)	36	11	5	20	35	50	38

*Won promotion-relegation play-off against Be1 NFA 4-2 on pens after 2-2 aggregate draw

NORWAY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bodo/Glimt (C)	30	18	8	4	71	31	62
Brann	30	17	8	5	55	33	59
Viking	30	16	9	5	61	39	57
Rosenborg	30	16	5	9	52	39	53
Molde	30	15	7	8	64	36	52
Fredrikstad	30	14	9	7	39	35	51
Stromsgodset	30	10	8	12	32	40	38
KFUM	30	9	10	11	35	36	37
Sarpsborg 08	30	10	7	13	43	55	37
Sandefjord	30	9	7	14	41	46	34
Kristiansund	30	8	10	12	32	45	34
HamKam	30	8	9	13	34	39	33
Tromso	30	9	6	15	34	44	33
Haugesund*	30	9	6	15	29	46	33
Lillestrom (R)	30	7	3	20	33	63	24
Odd (R)	30	5	8	17	26	54	23

*Won promotion-relegation play-off against Moss 2-0 on aggregate

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shelbourne (C)	36	17	12	7	40	27	63
Shamrock Rovers	36	17	10	9	50	35	61
St Patrick's Athletic	36	17	8	11	51	37	59
Derry City	36	14	13	9	48	31	55
Galway United	36	13	13	10	33	29	52
Sligo Rovers	36	13	10	13	40	51	49
Waterford	36	13	6	17	43	47	45
Bohemians	36	10	12	14	39	43	42
Drogheda United*	36	7	13	16	41	58	34
Dundalk (R)	36	5	11	20	23	50	26

*Won promotion-relegation play-off 3-1 against Bray Wanderers

SWEDEN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Malmo (C)	30	19	8	3	67	25	65
Hammarby	30	16	6	8	48	25	54
AIK	30	17	3	10	46	41	54
Djurgrden	30	16	5	9	45	35	53
Mjallby	30	14	8	8	44	35	50
GAIS	30	14	6	10	36	34	48
Elfsborg	30	13	6	11	52	44	45
Hacken	30	12	6	12	54	51	42
Sirius	30	12	5	13	47	46	41
Brommapojkarna	30	8	10	12	46	53	34
Norrkoping	30	9	7	14	36	57	34
Halmstad	30	10	3	17	32	50	33
IFK Goteborg	30	7	10	13	33	43	31
Varnamo*	30	7	10	13	30	40	31
Kalmar (R)	30	8	6	16	38	58	30
Vasteras (R)	30	6	5	19	26	43	23

*Won promotion-relegation play-off against Landskrona BoIS 3-2 on aggregate

SOUTH AMERICA

2024 COPA LIBERTADORES

Final

Nov 30 – Buenos Aires
Atletico Mineiro (Bra) 1 (Vargas 47)
Botafogo (Bra) 3 (Luiz Henrique 35, Alex Telles 44 pen, Junior Santos 90+7)
Atletico Mineiro: Everson – Lyanco (Mariano 46), Battaglia, Alonso; Scarpa (Vargas 46), Vera (Bernard 46), Franco, Guilherme Arana; Hulk, Deyverson (Alan Kardec 76), Paulinho.
Botafogo: John – Vitinho, Adryelson, Barboza, Alex Telles (Marcal 58); Marlon Freitas, Gregore; Luiz Henrique (Matheus Martins 79), Savarino (Barbosa 58), Almada (Junior Santos 80); Igor Jesus (Allan 90+3).
Sent off: Gregore 2.

2024 COPA SUDAMERICANA

Final

Nov 23 – Asuncion
Racing (Arg) 3 (Martirena 15, A. Martinez 20, R. Martinez 90+5)
Cruzeiro (Bra) 1 (Kaio Jorge 52)
Racing: Arias – Di Cesare, Sosa, Garcia Basso; Martirena, Nardoni, Almendra (Zuculini 56), Rojas; Quintero (Solari 87), A. Martinez (R. Martinez 75), Salas.
Cruzeiro: Cassio – William, Joao Marcelo, Villalba, Marlon (Kenji 85); Romero (Barreal 78), Walace (Lucas Silva 30); Gabriel Veron (Diaz 78), Matheus Pereira, Matheus Henrique; Kaio Jorge.

2024 COPA DO BRASIL

Final – 1st Leg

Nov 3 – Rio deJaneiro
Flamengo (Bra) 3 (De Arrascaeta 11, Gabriel Barbosa 39, 74)
Atletico Mineiro (Bra) 1 (Alan Kardec 79)

Final – 2nd Leg

Nov 10 – Belo Horizonte
Atletico Mineiro (Bra) 0
Flamengo (Bra) 1 (Plata 82)
Flamengo win 4-1 on aggregate

AFRICA

2024-25 CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Nov 26 – Lubumbashi
TP Mazembe (Cod) 0
MC Alger (Alg) 0

Nov 26 – Dar es Salaam
Young Africans (Tan) 0
Al Hilal (Sud) 2 (Coulibaly 63, Muzmel 90)

Dec 7 – Algiers
MC Alger (Alg) 2 (Abdellaoui 64, Bayazid 90+5)
Young Africans (Tan) 0

Dec 8 – Nouakchott
Al Hilal (Sud) 2 (Abdelrahman 22 pen, Girumugisha 90+1)
TP Mazembe (Cod) 1 (Kabwit 64)

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
MC Alger	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
TP Mazembe	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Young Africans	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

Group B

Nov 26 – Pretoria
Mamelodi Sundowns (RSA) 0
Maniema Union (Cod) 0

Nov 26 – Casablanca
Raja (Mar) 0
AS FAR (Mar) 2 (Hammoudan 41, Ait Ouarkhane 90+7)

Dec 7 – ElJadida
AS FAR (Mar) 1 (Hrimat 74)
Mamelodi Sundowns (RSA) 1 (Rayners 66)

Dec 7 – Kinshasa
Maniema Union (Cod) 1 (Bakasu 79)
Raja (Mar) 1 (Najjari 17)

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AS FAR	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Mamelodi Sundowns	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Maniema Union	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Raja	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Group C

Nov 26 – Cairo
Al Ahly (Egy) 4 (Kahraba 14, 48, Magdy Afsha 21, El Shahat 26)
Stade d'Abidjan (Civ) 2 (Kone 30, Assale 55)

Nov 26 – Algiers
CR Belouizdad (Alg) 1 (Mayo 66)
Orlando Pirates (RSA) 2 (Nkota 5, 27)

Dec 7 – Johannesburg
Orlando Pirates (RSA) 0
Al Ahly (Egy) 0

Dec 7 – Abidjan
Stade d'Abidjan (Civ) 0
CR Belouizdad (Alg) 1 (Mahious 71)

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ahly	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Orlando Pirates	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
CR Belouizdad	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Stade d'Abidjan	2	0	0	2	2	5	0

Group D

Nov 26 – Cairo
Pyramids (Egy) 5 (Adel 17, 73, Hamdy 50, Mayele 77, Atef 89)
Sagrada Esperanca (Ang) 1 (Cachi 90+2)

Nov 26 – Tunis
Esperance (Tun) 4 (Bouchniba 4, Mokwana 40, Bouguerra 76, Maacha 90+5)
Djoliba (Mli) 0

Dec 6 – Luanda
Sagrada Esperanca (Ang) 0
Esperance (Tun) 0

Dec 8 – Bamako
Djoliba (Mli) 0
Pyramids (Egy) 0

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pyramids	2	1	1	0	5	1	4
Esperance	2	1	1	0	4	0	4
Sagrada Esperanca	2	0	1	1	1	5	1
Djoliba	2	0	1	1	0	4	1

2024-25 CAF CONFEDERATION CUP

Group A

Nov 27:
Simba (Tan) 1-0 Bravos do Maquis (Ang);
CS Sfaxien (Tun) 0-1 CS Constantine (Alg)

Dec 8:
CS Constantine (Alg) 2-1 Simba (Tan);
Bravos do Maquis (Ang) 3-2 CS Sfaxien (Tun)

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CS Constantine	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Bravos do Maquis	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Simba	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
CS Sfaxien	2	0	0	2	2	4	0

Group B

Nov 27:
Stade Malien (Mli) 2-0 Stellenbosch (RSA);
RS Berkane (Mar) 2-0 Desportivo Lunda Sul (Ang)

Dec 8:
Stellenbosch (RSA) 1-3 RS Berkane (Mar);
Desportivo Lunda Sul (Ang) 1-1 Stade Malien (Mli)

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
RS Berkane	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Stade Malien	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Desportivo LS	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
Stellenbosch	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

Group C

Nov 27:
USM Alger (Alg) 6-0 Orapa United (Bot);
ASEC Abidjan (Civ) 2-0 ASC Jaraaf (Sen)

Dec 8:
ASC Jaraaf (Sen) 0-0 USM Alger (Alg);
Orapa United (Bot) 0-0 ASEC Abidjan (Civ)

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
USM Alger	2	1	1	0	6	0	4
ASEC Abidjan	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
ASC Jaraaf	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Orapa United	2	0	1	1	0	6	1

Group D

Nov 27:
Zamalek (Egy) 2-0 Black Bulls (Moz);
Al Masry (Egy) 2-0 Enyimba (Nga)

Dec 8:
Enyimba (Nga) 2-2 Zamalek (Egy);
Black Bulls (Moz) 1-1 Al Masry (Egy)

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zamalek	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Al Masry	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Enyimba	2	0	1	1	2	4	1
Black Bulls	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

MALAWI

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Silver Strikers (C)	30	19	10	1	58	17	67
Mighty Wanderers	30	17	7	6	57	19	58
Nyasa Big Bullets	30	14	13	3	42	20	55
Mzuzu City Hammers	30	13	9	8	31	32	48
CIVO United	30	11	10	9	35	27	43
Creck	30	10	12	8	44	33	42
Karonga United	30	11	9	10	30	30	42
Moyale Barracks	30	9	12	9	30	27	39
MAFCO	30	9	12	9	30	39	39
Kamuzu Barracks	30	8	13	9	30	29	37
Dedza Dynamos	30	7	15	8	32	31	36
Mighty Tigers	30	8	11	11	26	38	35
Chitipa United	30	7	8	15	35	46	29
FOMO (R)	30	8	5	17	20	38	29
Bangwe All Stars (R)	30	6	9	15	17	34	27
Baka City (R)	30	2	7	21	17	74	13

MOZAMBIQUE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Black Bulls (C)	22	15	6	1	47	21	51
Songo	22	14	7	1	34	13	49
Costa do Sol	22	13	5	4	35	19	44
Ferroviario Maputo	22	8	5	9	17	17	29
Ferroviario Nampula	22	7	6	9	23	24	27
Ferroviario Beira	22	7	6	9	15	18	27
Vilanculo	22	6	7	9	21	29	25
Desportivo Nacala	22	6	6	10	26	35	24
Baia de Pemba	22	6	6	10	14	25	24
Ferroviario de Licking	22	5	9	8	24	27	24
Tchumene	22	4	6	12	22	29	18
Textafrica (R)	22	5	3	14	20	41	18

REUNION

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Excelsior (C)	26	19	6	1	62	13	89
Saint-Pauloise	26	17	6	3	49	14	83
La Tamponnaise	26	16	6	4	66	19	80
Saint-Pierroise	26	15	7	4	46	18	78
Saint-Denis	26	15	5	6	56	22	76
Jeanne d'Arc	26	12	8	6	34	22	70
Saint-Louis	26	8	9	9	24	28	59
Piton Saint-Leu	26	8	5	13	28	38	55
Sainte-Rose	26	7	5	14	22	33	52
Saint-Louisienne	26	6	7	13	29	42	51
Trois Bassins*	26	7	4	15	24	41	51
Sainte-Suzanne (R)	26	7	3	16	29	57	50
Ravine Blanche (R)	26	5	7	14	21	48	48
Gauloise (R)	26	1	0	25	13	108	29

**Enter promotion-relegation play-off*
Win = 4 pts, Draw = 2 pts, Loss = 1 pt

ZIMBABWE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Simba Bhora (C)	34	20	6	8	39	24	66
Platinum	34	17	10	7	44	25	61
Ngezi Platinum	34	14	15	5	46	23	57
Manica Diamonds	34	14	12	8	27	19	54
Herentals	34	12	13	9	29	29	49
Highlanders	34	12	12	10	43	33	48
Chicken Inn	34	11	14	9	26	22	47
Dynamos	34	10	16	8	29	26	46
CAPS United	34	12	9	13	38	39	45
TelOne	34	9	15	10	34	32	42
Yadah	34	10	12	12	37	38	42
Green Fuel	34	10	12	12	28	37	42
Kariba	34	7	20	7	17	18	41
Bikita Minerals	34	8	14	12	27	36	38
Bulawayo Chiefs (R)	34	7	15	12	23	30	36
Hwange (R)	34	8	11	15	24	42	35
Chegutu Pirates (R)	34	8	9	17	22	36	33
Arenel Movers (R)	34	4	11	19	20	44	23

ASIA

2024-25 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

West Region

Matchday 5

Nov 25 – Al Ain
Al Ain (UAE) 1 (Kaku 90+3)
Al Ahli (KSA) 2 (Toney 70, 74)

Nov 25 – Dubai
Esteghlal (Irn) 0
Pakhtakor (Uzb) 0

Nov 25 – Al Khor
Al Gharafa (Qat) 1 (Joselu 75)
Al Nassr (KSA) 3 (Ronaldo 46, 64, Angelo 58)

Nov 25 – Al Rayyan
Al Rayyan (Qat) 1 (Bencharki 57)
Persepolis (Irn) 1 (Faraji 17)

Nov 26 – Karbala
Al Shorta (Irq) 1 (Youssef 50)
Al Wasl (UAE) 3 (Santos 14, Lima 64 pen, Gimenez 90+2 pen)

Nov 26 – Doha
Al Sadd (Qat) 1 (Otavio 71)
Al Hilal (KSA) 1 (Al Bulayhi 10)

Matchday 6

Dec 2 – Doha
Persepolis (Irn) 2 (Urunov 89, Gvelesiani 90+13 pen)
Al Shorta (Irq) 1 (Ali 19)

Dec 2 – Jeddah
Al Ahli (KSA) 2 (Toney 45+8 pen, 86 pen)
Esteghlal (Irn) 2 (Raphael Silva 42, Eslami 51)

Dec 2 – Dubai
Al Wasl (UAE) 1 (Caio 77)
Al Rayyan (Qat) 1 (Al Azizi 85 og)

Dec 2 – Riyadh
Al Nassr (KSA) 1 (Saiss 80 og)
Al Sadd (Qat) 2 (Afif 53, Ounas 90+9 pen)

Dec 3 – Tashkent
Pakhtakor (Uzb) 1 (Jurakuziev 6)
Al Ain (UAE) 1 (Rahimi 49)

Dec 3 – Riyadh
Al Hilal (KSA) 3 (Leonardo 18, Mitrovic 82, Milinkovic-Savic 85)
Al Gharafa (Qat) 0

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal	6	5	1	0	20	6	16
Al Ahli	6	5	1	0	14	5	16
Al Nassr	6	4	1	1	13	6	13
Al Sadd	6	3	3	0	8	4	12
Al Wasl	6	3	2	1	8	6	11
Persepolis	6	1	3	2	5	6	6
Al Rayyan	6	1	2	3	6	3	5
Esteghlal	6	1	2	3	5	8	5
Pakhtakor	6	0	4	2	2	4	4
Al Gharafa	6	1	1	4	7	14	4
Al Ain	6	0	2	4	10	18	2
Al Shorta	6	0	2	4	4	16	2

East Region

Matchday 5

Nov 26 – Kobe
Vissel Kobe (Jpn) 3 (Kikuchi 40, Roux 49 og, Sasaki 81)
Central Coast Mariners (Aus) 2 (Yamaguchi 54 og, Brandtman 74)

Nov 26 – Ulsan
Ulsan HD (Kor) 1 (Joo Min-kyu 73)
Shanghai Port (Chn) 3 (Vargas 11, 23, 83)

Nov 26 – Jinan
Shandong Taishan (Chn) 1 (Zeca 68)
Johor Darul Ta'zim (Mas) 0

Nov 26 – Buriram
Buriram United (Tha) 0
Kawasaki Frontale (Jpn) 3 (Miura 79, Tono 90+4, Kanda 90+7)

Nov 27 – Gwangju
Gwangju FC (Kor) 1 (Asani 58)
Shanghai Shenhua (Chn) 0

Nov 27 – Yokohama
Yokohama F. Marinos (Jpn) 2 (Yan Matheus 41, Anderson Lopes 90+5)
Pohang Steelers (Kor) 0

Matchday 6

Dec 3 – Gosford
Central Coast Mariners (Aus) 0
Yokohama F. Marinos (Jpn) 4 (Inoue 6, 30, Anderson Lopes 36, Amano 70)

Dec 3 – Pohang
Pohang Steelers (Kor) 3 (Han Chan-hee 13, Kim In-Sung 20, Jeong Jae-hee 90+1)
Vissel Kobe (Jpn) 1 (Sasaki 34)

Dec 3 – Johor Bahru
Johor Darul Ta'zim (Mas) 0
Buriram United (Tha) 0

Dec 3 – Shanghai
Shanghai Port (Chn) 1 (Oscar 76 pen)
Gwangju (Kor) 1 (Heo Yool 38)

Dec 4 – Kawasaki
Kawasaki Frontale (Jpn) 4 (Marcinho 3, Yamamoto 41, Jesiel 65, Yamada 90)
Shandong Taishan (Chn) 0

Dec 4 – Shanghai
Shanghai Shenhua (Chn) 1 (Andre Luis 23)
Ulsan HD (Kor) 2 (Cariello 58 pen, Kang Min-woo 66)

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Yokohama FM	6	4	1	1	20	9	13
Gwangju FC	6	4	1	1	13	7	13
Vissel Kobe	6	4	1	1	10	6	13
Kawasaki Frontale	6	4	0	2	11	4	12
Pohang Steelers	6	3	0	3	11	10	9
Johor Darul Ta'zim	6	2	2	2	9	6	8
Shanghai Port	6	2	2	2	10	12	8
Buriram United	6	2	2	2	3	9	8
Shanghai Shenhua	6	2	1	3	9	9	7
Shandong Taishan	6	2	1	3	9	13	7
Ulsan HD	6	1	0	5	3	14	3
CC Mariners	6	0	1	5	8	17	1

2024-25 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TWO

West Region

Group A

Nov 27:
Tractor (Irn) 3-3 Al Wakrah (Qat)

Dec 4:
Al Wakrah (Qat) 0-2 Ravshan Kulob (Tjk)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tractor (Q)	4	3	1	0	16	4	10
Al Wakrah (Q)	4	1	1	2	4	8	4
Ravshan Kulob	4	1	0	3	3	11	3
Mohun Bagan*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Withdrew*

Group B

Nov 27:
Altyn Asyr (Tkm) 0-2 Al Quwa Al Jawiya (Irq);
Al Taawoun (KSA) 2-1 Al Khaldiya (Bhr)

Dec 4:
Al Khaldiya (Bhr) 4-0 Altyn Asyr (Tkm);
Al Quwa Al Jawiya (Irq) 0-1 Al Taawoun (KSA)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Taawoun (Q)	6	5	0	1	13	6	15
Al Khaldiya (Q)	6	4	0	2	14	7	12
Al Quwa Al Jawiya	6	3	0	3	8	9	9
Altyn Asyr	6	0	0	6	2	15	0

Group C

Nov 26:
Sharjah (UAE) 3-1 Istiklol (Tjk);
Sepahan (Irn) 1-1 Al Wehdat (Jor)

Dec 3:
Al Wehdat (Jor) 1-3 Sharjah (UAE);
Istiklol (Tjk) 0-2 Sepahan (Irn)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sharjah (Q)	6	4	1	1	13	8	13
Al Wehdat (Q)	6	3	2	1	8	7	11
Sepahan	6	3	1	2	12	7	10
Istiklol	6	0	0	6	1	12	0

Group D

Nov 27:
Nasaf Qarshi (Uzb) 1-2 Al Kuwait (Kuw);
Al Hussein Irbid (Jor) 2-3 Shabab Al Ahli (UAE)

Dec 4:
Shabab Al Ahli (UAE) 3-2 Nasaf Qarshi (Uzb);
Al Kuwait (Kuw) 2-2 Al Hussein Irbid (Jor)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shabab Al Ahli (Q)	6	4	1	1	17	11	13
Al Hussein (Q)	6	3	1	2	11	11	10
Al Kuwait	6	1	3	2	9	12	6
Nasaf Qarshi	6	1	1	4	7	10	4

East Region

Group E

Nov 28:
Eastern (Hkg) 1-4 Sydney FC (Aus);
Kaya–Iloilo (Phi) 1-1 Sanfrecce Hiroshima (Jpn)

Dec 5:
Sanfrecce Hiroshima (Jpn) 4-1 Eastern (Hkg);
Sydney FC (Aus) 3-1 Kaya–Iloilo (Phi)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sanfrecce (Q)	6	5	1	0	14	5	16
Sydney FC (Q)	6	4	0	2	17	6	12
Kaya-Iloilo	6	1	1	4	6	14	4
Eastern	6	1	0	5	7	19	3

Group F

Nov 28:
Zhejiang (Chn) 4-2 Lion City Sailors (Sgp);
Port (Tha) 2-2 Persib Bandung (Idn)

Dec 5:
Persib Bandung (Idn) 3-4 Zhejiang (Chn);
Lion City Sailors (Sgp) 5-2 Port (Tha)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lion City Sailors (Q)	6	3	1	2	15	11	10
Port (Q)	6	3	1	2	9	11	10
Zhejiang	6	3	0	3	10	10	9
Persib Bandung	6	1	2	3	9	11	5

Group G

Nov 27:
Nam Dinh (Vie) 3-0 Lee Man (Hkg);
Tampines Rovers (Sgp) 1-0 Bangkok United (Tha)

Dec 4:
Lee Man (Hkg) 0-0 Tampines Rovers (Sgp);
Bangkok United (Tha) 3-2 Nam Dinh (Vie)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bangkok Utd (Q)	6	4	1	1	12	6	13
Nam Dinh (Q)	6	3	2	1	13	8	11
Tampines Rovers	6	2	2	2	11	11	8
Lee Man	6	0	1	5	2	13	1

Group H

Nov 28:
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors (Kor) 4-0 DH Cebu (Phi);
Selangor (Mas) 1-2 Muangthong United (Tha)

Dec 5:
DH Cebu (Phi) 0-4 Selangor (Mas);
Muangthong United (Tha) 1-0 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors (Kor)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jeonbuk HM (Q)	6	4	0	2	16	4	12
Muangthong Utd (Q)	6	3	2	1	16	10	11
Selangor	6	3	1	2	9	5	10
DH Cebu	6	0	1	5	4	26	1

2024-25 AFC CHALLENGE LEAGUE

West Region

Group A

Oct 26:
East Bengal (Ind) 2-2 Paro (Bhu);
Nejmeh (Lbn) 1-0 Bashundhara Kings (Ban)

Oct 29:
Paro (Bhu) 1-0 Nejmeh (Lbn); Bashundhara Kings (Ban) 0-4 East Bengal (Ind)

Nov 1:
East Bengal (Ind) 3-2 Nejmeh (Lbn);
Bashundhara Kings (Ban) 1-2 Paro (Bhu)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
East Bengal (Q)	3	2	1	0	9	4	7
Nejmeh	3	2	0	1	5	4	6
Paro	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
Bashundhara Kings	3	0	0	3	1	7	0

Group B

Oct 26:
Al Arabi (Kuw) 0-1 Abdysh-Ata Kant (Kgz);
Arkadag (Tkm) 2-1 Maziya (Mdv)

Oct 29:
Abdysh-Ata Kant (Kgz) 0-2 Arkadag (Tkm);
Maziya (Mdv) 0-2 Al Arabi (Kuw)

Nov 1:
Al Arabi (Kuw) 3-2 Arkadag (Tkm);
Maziya (Mdv) 0-3 Abdysh-Ata Kant (Kgz)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arkadag (Q)	3	2	0	1	6	4	6
Al Arabi (Q)	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
Abdysh-Ata Kant	3	2	0	1	4	2	6
Maziya	3	0	0	3	1	7	0

Group C

Oct 26:
Al Ahli Club (Bhr) 0-0 Hilal Al Quds (Ple);
Al Fotuwa (Syr) 0-5 Al Seeb (Oma)

Oct 29:
Hilal Al Quds (Ple) 0-0 Al Fotuwa (Syr);
Al Seeb (Oma) 1-0 Al Ahli Club (Bhr)

Nov 1:
Al Ahli Club (Bhr) 1-1 Al Fotuwa (Syr);
Al Fotuwa (Syr) 3-0 Hilal Al Quds (Ple)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Seeb (Q)	3	3	0	0	9	0	9
Al Ahli Club	3	0	2	1	1	2	2
Al Fotuwa	3	0	2	1	1	6	2
Hilal Al Quds	3	0	2	1	0	3	2

East Region

Group D

Oct 27:
Young Elephants (Lao) 0-2 Shan United (Mya)

Oct 30:
Tainan City (Tpe) 3-2 Young Elephants (Lao)

Nov 2:
Shan United (Mya) 2-2 Tainan City (Tpe)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shan United (Q)	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Tainan City (Q)	2	1	1	0	5	4	4
Young Elephants	2	0	0	2	2	5	0

Group E

Oct 27:
SP Falcons (Mng) 0–0 Madura United (Idn)

Oct 30:
Svay Rieng (Cam) 2–1 SP Falcons (Mng)

Nov 2:
Madura United (Idn) 2-1 Svay Rieng (Cam)

Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Madura United (Q)	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Svay Rieng (Q)	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
SP Falcons	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

Knockout Stage Draw

Quarter-Finals

Mar 5-6:
Al Arabi (Kuw) v Al Seeb (Oma);
East Bengal (Ind) v Arkadag (Tkm);
Svay Rieng (Cam) v Shan United (Mya);
Tainan City (Tpe) v Madura United (Idn)

Mar 12-13:
Al Seeb (Oma) v Al Arabi (Kuw);
Arkadag (Tkm) v East Bengal (Ind);
Shan United (Mya) v Svay Rieng (Cam);
Madura United (Idn) v Tainan City (Tpe)

KYRGYZSTAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Abdysh-Ata Kant (C)	27	22	3	2	67	15	69
Dordoi Bishkek	27	17	8	2	43	18	59
Muras United	27	16	6	5	50	34	54
Alay	27	13	8	6	37	29	47
Neftchi	27	8	7	12	36	40	31
Ilbirs	27	8	2	17	30	48	26
OshMU Aldier	27	6	7	14	27	43	25
Talant	27	6	6	15	20	43	24
Alga	27	5	5	17	29	48	20
Kyrgyzaltyn (R)	27	4	8	15	19	40	20

SOUTH KOREA

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ulsan HD (C)	38	21	9	8	62	40	72
Gangwon FC	38	19	7	12	62	56	64
Gimcheon Sangmu	38	18	9	11	55	41	63
FC Seoul	38	16	10	12	55	42	58
Suwon FC	38	15	8	15	54	57	53
Pohang Steelers	38	14	11	13	53	50	53

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jeju United	38	15	4	19	38	54	49
Daejeon Hana Citizen	38	12	12	14	43	47	48
Gwangju FC	38	14	5	19	42	49	47
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors*	38	10	12	16	49	59	42
Daegu FC**	38	9	13	16	45	52	40
Incheon United (R)	38	9	12	17	38	49	39

**Won promotion-relegation play-off against Seoul E-Land 4-2 on aggregate*
***Won promotion-relegation play-off against Chungnam Asan 6-5 on aggregate after extra-time*

UZBEKISTAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nasaf Qarshi (C)	26	15	7	4	35	18	52
AGMK	26	14	5	7	40	29	47
Sogdiana	26	12	7	7	41	29	43
Navbahor	26	11	10	5	42	31	43
Neftchi	26	11	10	5	32	24	43
Pakhtakor	26	11	5	10	42	37	38
Surkhon Termez	26	10	6	10	30	31	36
Dinamo Samarqand	26	9	5	12	35	38	32
Andijan	26	6	12	8	36	36	30
Bunyodkor	26	7	9	10	27	38	30
Qizilqum	26	6	9	11	25	34	27
Olympic* (R)	26	6	7	13	22	38	25
Metalourg** (R)	26	3	14	9	22	30	23
Lokomotiv Tashkent (R)	26	5	6	15	28	44	21

**Lost promotion-relegation play-off against Shortan 1-0*
***Lost promotion-relegation play-off against Kokand-1912 3-2 on pens following 1-1 draw after extra-time*

CONCACAF

CANADA

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Forge* (S)	28	15	5	8	45	31	50
Cavalry* (C)	28	12	12	4	39	27	48
Atletico Ottawa*	28	11	11	6	42	31	44
York United**	28	11	6	11	35	36	39
Pacific**	28	9	7	12	27	32	34
HFX Wanderers	28	7	9	12	37	43	30
Vancouver FC	28	7	9	12	29	43	30
Valour	28	7	7	14	31	42	28

**Advance to finals stage*
***Enter play-in round*

Finals Stage

Play-In Round

Oct 23:
York United 2-0 Pacific

Quarter-Final

Oct 27:
Atletico Ottawa 2-2 York United
(AET, Atletico Ottawa win 5-4 on pens)

Semi-Final 1

Oct 27:
Forge 0-1 Cavalry

Semi-Final 2

Nov 2:
Forge 1-0 Atletico Ottawa

Final

Nov 9 – Calgary
Cavalry 2 (Warschewski 32 pen, Camargo 38)
Forge 1 (Achinioti-Jonsson 52)
Cavalry: Carducci – Aird (Kobza 82), Klomp, Montgomery, Kamdem; Shome, Gutierrez; Musse, Camargo (Shaw 58), Herdman (Trafford 71); Warschewski (Wright 82).
Forge: Koleilat – Duncan (Campbell 81), Achinioti-Jonsson, Samuel, Owolabi-Belewu; Bekker, Hojabrpour; Jensen (Parra 69), Choiniere, Ampomah (Borges 80); Badibanga.

PANAMA

Clausura East

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Plaza Amador*	16	8	6	2	18	13	30
Sporting San Miguelito*	16	8	5	3	16	9	29
Arabe Unido**	16	7	6	3	19	10	27
Tauro	16	6	6	4	18	15	24
Alianza	16	6	3	7	15	18	21
Deportivo del Este	16	3	7	6	14	23	16

*Advance to finals stage
**Enter play-offs

Clausura West

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Independiente* (C)	16	9	4	3	22	15	31
Universitario**	16	7	2	7	18	18	23
Veraguas United**	16	5	5	6	18	19	20
UMECIT	16	5	4	7	12	13	19
San Francisco	16	2	5	9	13	21	11
Herrera	16	1	5	10	12	21	8

*Advance to finals stage
**Enter play-offs

Finals Stage

Play-Offs

Nov 9:
Sporting San Miguelito 2-3 Veraguas United;
Universitario 0-1 Arabe Unido

Semi-Finals

Nov 17:
Arabe Unido 1-2 Plaza Amador;
Veraguas United 1-2 Independiente

Nov 23:
Plaza Amador 3-2 Arabe Unido (agg 5-3);
Independiente 1-0 Veraguas United (agg 3-1)

Final

Nov 30:
Independiente 2-1 Plaza Amador

2024 CENTRAL AMERICAN CUP

Final

Nov 27 – Esteli
Real Esteli (Nca) 1 (Vargas 13)
Alajuelense (Crc) 1 (Borges 36 pen)

Dec 1 – Alajuela
Alajuelense (Crc) 2 (Angulo 18, Toril 31)
Real Esteli (Nca) 1 (Medina 90+1)
Alajuelense win 3-2 on aggregate

2024 CONCACAF CARIBBEAN CUP

Third Place Play-Off

Nov 26 – Santiago de los Caballeros
Real Hope (Hai) 1 (Patterson 23)
Moca (Dom) 0

Dec 3 – Moca
Moca (Dom) 2 (De Pena 71, 79)
Real Hope (Hai) 3 (Exilus 66, Saint-Fleur 90, Intervil 90+5)
Real Hope win 4-2 on aggregate

Final

Nov 26 – Kingston
Cavalier (Jam) 1 (Stein 20)
Cibao (Dom) 0

Dec 3 – Santiago de los Caballeros
Cibao (Dom) 2 (Diaz 27, Correa 28)
Cavalier (Jam) 1 (Atkinson 54)
2-2 on aggregate. Cavalier win on away goals

OCEANIA

COOK ISLANDS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tupapa Maraerenga (C)	15	13	2	0	56	9	41
Matavera-Ngatangiia	15	7	4	4	33	23	25
Avatiu	15	7	1	7	27	40	22
Puaikura	15	4	5	6	27	32	17
Nikao	15	4	3	8	23	44	15
Titikaveka	15	2	1	12	15	33	7

NEW ZEALAND

Northern League

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland City*	22	16	3	3	53	21	51
Western Springs*	22	14	4	4	52	30	46
Eastern Suburbs*	22	14	2	6	38	20	44
Birkenhead United*	22	13	4	5	54	31	43
Auckland United	22	12	4	6	39	27	40
Bay Olympic	22	9	1	12	39	42	28
Tauranga City	22	7	4	11	38	56	25
West Coast Rangers	22	6	5	11	28	45	23
East Coast Bays	22	5	7	10	29	38	22
Manurewa**	22	5	4	13	41	56	19
Melville United (R)	22	6	0	16	29	54	18
Hamilton Wanderers (R)	22	2	8	12	28	48	14

*Advance to national championship
**Won promotion-relegation play-off against Manukau United 4-2 on pens after 4-4 aggregate draw

Central League

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wellington Olympic*	18	17	0	1	79	16	51
Western Suburbs*	18	13	1	4	54	24	40
Napier City Rovers*	18	13	1	4	53	23	40
Miramar	18	11	2	5	61	21	35
Wellington Phoenix II**	18	7	3	8	32	38	24
Waterside Karori	18	7	3	8	33	46	24
Petone	18	6	3	9	28	45	21
Island Bay United	18	4	0	14	25	64	12
North Wellington	18	2	3	13	23	63	9
Stop Out (R)	18	1	2	15	19	67	5

*Advance to national championship
**Advance to national championship due to Australia Men's A-League requirements

Southern League

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cashmere Technical*	18	15	2	1	90	19	47
Coastal Spirit*	18	14	3	1	59	17	45
Christchurch United	18	13	2	3	64	21	41
Nelson Suburbs	17	8	5	4	52	39	29
Ferrymead Bays	18	8	1	9	39	39	25
Nomads United	18	7	3	8	27	31	24
Dunedin City Royals	17	6	1	10	27	46	19
Selwyn United	18	4	2	12	31	68	14
Universities	18	3	2	13	21	46	11
Twenty 11 (R)	18	0	1	17	9	93	1

*Advance to national championship

National League

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Birkenhead United*	9	6	2	1	23	16	20
Auckland City*	9	6	1	2	20	10	19
Western Springs	9	6	0	3	25	16	18
Napier City Rovers	9	5	2	2	21	14	17
Wellington Phoenix II	9	4	1	4	16	19	13
Wellington Olympic	9	3	2	4	17	15	11
Coastal Spirit	9	3	2	4	18	20	11
Cashmere Technical	9	2	3	4	16	18	9
Eastern Suburbs	9	1	2	6	8	17	5
Western Suburbs	9	1	1	7	9	28	4

*Advance to grand final

Grand Final

Dec 1 – Albany
Birkenhead United 1 (Patterson 23)
Auckland City 2 (Jorgensen 45 og, Kilkolly 110)
After Extra-Time

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hekari United* (C)	14	11	2	1	35	7	35
PRK Gulf Komara*	14	6	5	3	23	17	23
Port Moresby Strikers*	14	6	4	4	16	16	22
Lae City*	14	5	3	6	19	19	18
Morobe Wawens	14	4	5	5	20	21	17
United Highlands	14	5	2	7	22	24	17
Lae City Dwellers	14	4	2	8	21	33	14
Admiralty Island	14	3	1	10	13	32	10

*Advance to finals stage

Finals Stage

Semi-Finals

Oct 26:
Hekari United 3-0 Lae City;
PRK Gulf Komara 2-1 Port Moresby Strikers

Third Place Play-Off

Nov 2:
Port Moresby Strikers 2-3 Lae City

Final

Nov 2:
Hekari United 2-1 PRK Gulf Komara

WORLD

2025 CLUB WORLD CUP

Group Stage Draw

Group A

Palmeiras (Bra);
Porto (Por);
Al Ahly (Egy);
Inter Miami (USA)

Group B

Paris Saint-Germain (Fra);
Atletico Madrid (Spa);
Botafogo (Bra);
Seattle Sounders (USA)

Group C

Bayern Munich (Ger);
Auckland City (Nzl);
Benfica (Por);
Boca Juniors (Arg)

Group D

Flamengo (Bra);
Chelsea (Che);
Leon (Mex);
Esperance (Tun)

Group E

River Plate (Arg);
Urawa Red Diamonds (Jpn);
Monterrey (Mex);
Internazionale (Ita)

Group F

Fluminense (Bra);
Borussia Dortmund (Ger);
Ulsan HD (Kor);
Mamelodi Sundowns (RSA)

Group G

Manchester City (Eng);
Wydad (Mar);
Al Ain (UAE);
Juventus (Ita)

Group H

Real Madrid (Spa);
Al Hilal (KSA);
Pachuca (Mex);
Red Bull Salzburg (Aut)

Tournament takes place June 15-July 13.

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Jason McAteer

Republic of Ireland v Netherlands

2001, World Cup qualifier, Lansdowne Road

With a place at the 2002 World Cup on the line, Republic of Ireland midfielder Jason McAteer delivered for his country against the Netherlands in a memorable clash in Dublin

Match-winner... McAteer celebrates at the final whistle

"When the World Cup qualification group was announced and we were drawn alongside Portugal and the Netherlands, they were the firm favourites – but we were ready to qualify.

Mick McCarthy had taken over an ageing squad from Jack Charlton and evolved it with a successful youth team, with Robbie Keane, Damien Duff and Richard Dunne. We were at our peak as a group. It was a settled team, with arguably the best midfielder in the world in Roy Keane.

We started the campaign in Amsterdam. We went 2-0 up against a very good Dutch team. One of the most poignant moments was when we came in the dressing room and celebrated a 2-2 draw after being 2-0 up with 20 minutes to go. Roy was fuming. He said: "You're all hugging and high-fiving, but you should be disappointed we've thrown away two points." And it resonated.

We got a draw against Portugal, home and away. That gave us confidence. It set up the game against the Netherlands at Lansdowne Road: win, and we would qualify for the World Cup.

I wasn't in form, I was out of the team at Blackburn, but I had a very good relationship with Mick. He was more of an uncle to me than a manager. I didn't expect to play, but I'd had a really good week's training – I was just on fire for some reason. When Mick named the team, the nerves set in. I didn't want to let the manager down.

It was a brilliant team we were up against – Edwin van der Sar, Jaap Stam, Phillip Cocu, Marc Overmars, Ruud van Nistelrooy, Patrick Kluivert. I remember Roy smashing Overmars in the first minute, but it didn't affect them. We got battered in the first half. Sometimes when the other team misses a lot of chances, you think: "Hang on, this could be our day." But then Gary Kelly got sent off. I remember feeling sorry for him, because if we'd lost, he was going to get all the criticism.

But sometimes ten men can grow into 12, especially at 0-0. We became more resilient.

We got a corner and I took it. I had to run all the way across to the other corner. I took it and it got cleared. I've got to be honest, I was knackered. I should've got back into position, but I didn't. I ambled around the left-hand side. The ball eventually made its way across to Steve Finnan, who should have had me on the right-hand side helping him.

He scooped a ball into the box, and instinct took over. I got a lovely bit of spin on it. I bent it around Van der Sar into the top corner.

We were never going to let it go. They created opportunities and should have equalised, but it was our day.

There was one regret after the game. I got in the dressing room and was gathering my thoughts. The physio came in and said: "U2 are playing at Slane Castle. Bono has been on the phone. He wants you to fly up in a helicopter. He wants to you stay in your kit and go up on the stage."

I just thought: "This is too good to be true. It's not happening." I declined the offer, thinking it was a wind-up.

> "Bono has been on the phone. He wants you to fly up in a helicopter. He wants to you stay in your kit and go up on the stage"

But Bono actually shouted my name to the crowd. He said: "Just imagine seeing Jason McAteer..." They'd played the game on the big screen before the show. Bono said we were the best warm-up act they'd ever had."

Interview by Ryan Baldi

Republic of Ireland 1-0 Netherlands
(McAteer 68)

Manager: Mick McCarthy
Given; Harte, Kilbane, Staunton, Holland, Robbie Keane (Finnan 57), Dunne, Roy Keane, Duff (Quinn 88), Kelly, McAteer (O'Brien 90)

Manager: Louis van Gaal
Van der Sar; Melchiot, Zenden (Hasselbaink 54), Cocu, Stam, Van Nistelrooy, Kluivert, Van Bommel, Hofland, Overmars (Van Bronckhorst 71), Numan (Van Hooijdonk 63)

Crucial...Ireland's players celebrate McAteer's goal

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